

**Learning to Preach**  
**Social Learning Theory and the**  
**Development of Christian Preachers**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

I declare that:

- (a) this thesis has been composed by myself;
- (b) the work is my own;
- (c) the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as noted in the text.

Signed:

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Geoffrey Stevenson



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*Soli Deo Gloria*



## ***Abstract***

In this thesis I investigate contemporary education theory as a way of understanding formative influences in the development of Christian preachers. I suggest that concepts of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, along with recognition of role models and mentors, have a part to play in the life-long project that is learning to preach.

In my Introduction I consider a definition of preaching for the purpose of the research and some historical approaches to developing preachers. I examine in Chapter 2 adult learning principles and cognitively-oriented concepts, such as learning styles and the theory of multiple intelligences. In Chapters 3 and 4 social learning theories that I examine include imitation, the effect of role models, and the influence of the mentor or the coach. Further, I ask to what extent the development of the preacher, as in many other professions with agreed standards of competency, does and should take place within communities of practice where legitimate peripheral participation (as developed in the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger) marks the developing preacher's sense of his or her own learning trajectory. After a fifth chapter on methodologies, these concepts are tested in three field studies that use a range of sociological research methods. I conduct in Chapter 6 quantitative analysis of questionnaires returned by Church of Scotland ministers, in Chapter 7 qualitative analysis of the published testimony of fifteen experienced preachers, and in Chapter 8 qualitative analysis of interviews with twelve young Methodist preachers.

In my conclusion I develop a theologically nuanced version of Lave and Wenger's concept which I term a community of agreed sermonic enterprise. Principal practical recommendations deriving from this centre on creating supportive networks of reflective preaching practitioners, enhancing the provision of mentor-mentee relationships, and educating congregations for their role in shaping preachers.





# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	v
Abstract .....	vii
Table of Figures and Tables .....	xiii
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Structure of thesis.....	2
Personal context .....	3
Cultural context.....	4
Preliminary educational questions .....	8
Where does learning preaching happen?.....	8
How is learning preaching adult learning?.....	8
Is learning preaching human or divine? .....	9
Can learning preaching be studied socially? .....	11
Towards a definition of preaching .....	12
New Testament preaching.....	13
Preaching as proclamation and as instruction .....	15
Refining the person and distilling the truth.....	16
Recognising the social dimension of preaching.....	18
Preaching according to David Buttrick .....	19
Metaphors for the preacher .....	20
A functional description.....	21
A definition with a coda .....	22
The qualities of a preacher .....	23
Homiletics and the training of preachers .....	25
Conclusion .....	32
<b>Chapter 2 Cognitive Theories of Learning .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Individual and social theories of learning .....	33
Why not a behavioural analysis?.....	34
Cognitive styles.....	35
Preaching and psychological type.....	36
Multiple intelligences.....	38
Constructivist learning theories .....	40
Conceptions of learning .....	40
A theoretical application of learning modes .....	43
Critique of learning styles .....	45
Conflict and cognitive dissonance .....	47
Experiential learning .....	47
Adult education and adult learning .....	51
Conclusion .....	55
<b>Chapter 3 Imitation and Role Models .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Imitation, copying and <i>mimesis</i> .....	58
Imitation and the preacher's skills .....	60
African-American preachers .....	63
Martyn Lloyd-Jones .....	66
Imitation and the preacher's theology.....	69
Imitation and the preacher's character .....	70
Identification of medium and message .....	70

The preacher's holiness .....	71
The uniqueness of the preacher .....	74
Conclusion.....	75
<b>Chapter 4 Communities of Practice .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Part 1: Social participation as learning .....	78
Negotiating meaning in the community of practice .....	82
Dimension 1: A community of mutual engagement .....	82
Dimension 2: A negotiated enterprise .....	86
Dimension 3: A shared repertoire .....	88
Part 2: Mentoring and peer learning .....	90
Discussion of three church examples .....	94
A Baptist perspective .....	94
An Anglican perspective .....	94
A Methodist perspective.....	95
Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) .....	96
Conclusion.....	100
<b>Chapter 5 Empirical Research Methodologies.....</b>	<b>101</b>
Field Study 1: Church of Scotland ministers .....	101
Survey design and rationale .....	101
Composition of the sample by age, experience and gender .....	104
Gender distribution.....	107
Initial data analysis.....	108
Field Study 2: Preachers' autobiographical essays .....	109
Demand characteristics .....	110
Process.....	113
Field Study 3: Methodist preachers in Liverpool.....	113
Method and contributors .....	113
The analytical method used and its limitations .....	113
Justification of the data set .....	115
Categories of reflective learning analysed in the discourse .....	117
Research ethics.....	118
Conclusion.....	119
<b>Chapter 6 Field Study 1: Church of Scotland Ministers .....</b>	<b>121</b>
Introduction .....	121
Analysis .....	121
Metaphors for preaching .....	125
Educational Preferences .....	129
Post-ordination influences.....	131
Continuing professional development.....	132
Role models and mentors .....	135
Admiration and early influence of preaching.....	136
Mentoring and the influence of mentors .....	137
Gender and mentoring.....	139
Conclusion.....	140
<b>Chapter 7 Field Study 2: Preachers' Autobiographical Essays .....</b>	<b>143</b>
Introduction .....	143
Categories of learning experience .....	143

Self-reflection.....	143
Encouragement and feedback .....	144
Formal instruction .....	144
Peer group influence .....	144
Vocation and calling .....	144
Role models.....	147
Mentoring .....	149
Encouragement and apprenticeship.....	151
Extending the community of practice .....	152
‘Intuitive training’ .....	154
Negative influences .....	156
Congregational influence .....	158
Conclusion .....	160
<b>Chapter 8 Field Study 3: Liverpool Methodist Preachers.....</b>	<b>161</b>
Introduction .....	161
Interview with David Wilkinson.....	161
Vocation and calling .....	162
Calling and role models .....	164
Calling and peer models.....	166
Disincentives to vocation .....	169
An intentional climate of encouragement .....	170
Peer models .....	171
Role models.....	173
Mentoring .....	178
Conclusion .....	181
<b>Chapter 9 Revising and exploring the community of practice .....</b>	<b>183</b>
Theoretical overview.....	183
Adult learning, cognitive theories and learning styles .....	183
Imitation and role models.....	185
Situated learning and mentoring .....	186
Peer learning.....	187
Learning with the congregation .....	188
Community of practice indicators .....	188
Revising the concept .....	189
Six frames of the CASE concept.....	191
Empirical review .....	194
Church of Scotland ministers .....	194
Preachers’ autobiographical essays.....	198
Liverpool Methodist preachers .....	199
Conclusion .....	200
<b>Chapter 10 Final Reflections and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>201</b>
Theological reflections.....	201
Seven facets of a CASE .....	203
Recommendations and connections .....	206
Theology of preaching .....	206
Voice training.....	207
Recognising adult learning.....	207

Self-reflection in learning .....	208
Gender studies .....	208
Recognising role models .....	209
Mentoring to induct .....	209
Supervision in placements .....	209
Peer-assisted learning .....	210
Congregations as educators .....	210
Concluding remarks .....	211
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>213</b>
1. Homiletics and Theology .....	213
2. Education, Philosophy, and Social Science .....	226
3. General .....	233
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Research Ethics .....</b>	<b>235</b>
Statement of research ethics assessment .....	235
Ethics (Self) Assessment Form .....	236
<b>Appendix 2: Field Study 1 .....</b>	<b>238</b>
Appendix 2.1: Invitation to participate .....	238
Appendix 2.2 New College Homiletics Class 1 <sup>st</sup> Questionnaire.....	239
Appendix 2.3 New College Homiletics Class 2 <sup>nd</sup> Questionnaire.....	243
Appendix 2.4 Lichfield Diocese Training Day Questionnaire.....	244
Appendix 2.5: The SurveyMonkey Questionnaire.....	247
Appendix 2.6: Further methodological issues arising from Field Study 1.....	255
Pilot questionnaires .....	255
How SurveyMonkey works.....	257
The final pilot.....	257
Checking for duplicates.....	258
Sampling and representation, demand characteristics.....	258
Sources of bias and the effect of non-response on the survey .....	259
The feeling of agency.....	260
<b>Appendix 3: Field Study 2 .....</b>	<b>261</b>
Appendix 3.1: Summary of research participants .....	261
Appendix 3.2: Invitation letter to writers for Pulpit Journeys.....	262
Appendix 3.3: Follow-up letter to writers for Pulpit Journeys .....	263
Appendix 3.4: Letter requesting permission to use material.....	264
<b>Appendix 4: Field Study 3 .....</b>	<b>266</b>
Appendix 4.1: Further description of process .....	266
Appendix 4.2: List of research participants .....	267
Appendix 4.3: Interview Participant Explanation .....	268
Appendix 4.4: Interview Participant Consent Form.....	269
Appendix 4.5: Researcher's Interview Schedule .....	270

## ***Table of Figures and Tables***

Figure 5-1 Age Range of Sample.....	104
Figure 5-2 Preaching Experience in years.....	105
Figure 5-3 Preaching Experience by gender.....	107
Figure 6-1 Positive Preaching Attitude Factor distribution.....	124
Figure 6-2 Present Study / Learning Preferences.....	133
Table 6-1 Ranking of Preaching Metaphors.....	126

Unless otherwise attributed, all Bible quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?<sup>1</sup>

The subject of this work of homiletical theology is the ways in which contemporary Christian preachers in the UK learn to preach. In this thesis I explore educational theory and conduct empirical research to provide tools to investigate crucial formative influences in the development of preachers. I am testing theories of learning empirically in three field studies involving a number of British Protestant preachers from different denominations. In my analyses I am primarily taking a phenomenological approach, examining individual conceptions of learning as they have been mediated by context and environment.

In order to develop a fuller understanding of learning preaching, I am chiefly examining social as opposed to cognitive learning theories. In particular I investigate imitation, the effect of role models, and the influence of the mentor and coach. Additionally but most importantly, I use the concept of ‘communities of practice’ as a way of describing the close linkage between the preacher and the horizontal elements of the preaching relationship, such as the listener, traditions of practice, mentors and peers. This term stems from the work of anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. They define it as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.”<sup>2</sup> I contend that such a concept enables us to understand the formation of the preacher in ways that are usually missed by educational approaches that focus on the inculcation of concepts and techniques in a classroom environment. They are also missed by theories of preaching that focus only on the personal holiness of the preacher, the orthodoxy of the message and the sovereign action of the divine – vital though these are to preaching that will honour God and serve and feed the church.

My principal research questions are, first, to what extent can cognitive theories of learning be usefully developed to critique and improve existing educational strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, 'Meno', in *The Dialogues of Plato, Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 98.

for teaching preaching? Second, how far can social theories of learning, including situated learning and the concept of the community of practice provide better models for improving the development of preachers? Third, how extensive is imitation and modelling in the development of preachers, and to what extent can positive outcomes be encouraged? What arguments are there for a more substantive role for the supervisor, mentor or coach? How can peers and colleagues assist the growth of the learning preacher?

Methods of teaching preaching that are current in ministerial formation programmes in Britain are, I have found, under-developed in these areas. Teaching methods also seem to lack the epistemological and pedagogical foundations that could lead to progressive revision. Through this thesis I hope to provide new homiletical understandings that will in turn contribute constructively to the educational climate and learning processes of preachers preparing to serve the church.

## **Structure of thesis**

After a personal statement indicating what I bring to the study, I explain why the research concentrates on learning and not teaching, and why I am using some of the tools and discourse of the sociologist as well as those of the theologian. In order to establish an understanding of the wider context for learning preaching, I examine some of the challenges facing preaching in the UK. I discuss views and definitions of preaching that inform the understanding of preaching serving this research; that discussion forms the largest section in this chapter. From this I move into an evaluation of some historical views of what it takes to become a good preacher, before finally considering institutional approaches to training preachers through what is usually called homiletics.

In chapters 2, 3 and 4 I examine educational theories and approaches to learning from a range of sociological and theological perspectives. Chapter 5 follows this theoretical discussion with an introduction to my empirical research methodologies and a discussion of the principal research issues arising from my three field studies, including Research Ethics considerations. I present these field studies in the next three chapters. In chapter 6 I undertake quantitative analysis of a questionnaire sent to Church of Scotland ministers, in chapter 7 the thematic analysis of a recent book of autobiographical essays by fifteen experienced preachers, and in chapter 8 qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with a group of twelve young Methodist preachers. Finally in chapter 9 I draw conclusions, and advance ten



recommendations for educational strategies designed to maximise the learning of student preachers.

## **Personal context**

At the heart of the act of Christian preaching is a vocation to communicate. This is located in a theological understanding of a God who communicates and whose nature includes loving and grace-filled self-revelation that includes calling Christian preachers to participate in this by, in the words of Mary Katherine Hilker, the “naming of grace in human experience.”<sup>3</sup> My vocation to train and develop preachers is the latest aspect of a long-term engagement I have had with what must come under a portmanteau term, ‘Christian communication.’<sup>4</sup> From roughly the end of my time at university (where I read Philosophy and Theology, but extra-curricularly engaged in a lively exploration of theatre, acting and directing) I have sought to engage with artistic, academic and rhetorical attempts to explore and convey Christian truth. In 1975 at the age of 24 I began attending an evangelical, ‘charismatic’ church in York, England where contemporary art forms were actively promoted in worship and mission. I began an eighteen-year career in the theatre, specialising in mime and physical theatre. This was followed by twelve years in theological education, firstly as Director of the Centre for Christian Communication at St John’s College, Durham University and then as a tutor in Homiletics at New College, Edinburgh.

The Centre ran from 1996 to 2005 and was an independently-funded research and training unit with a mission to facilitate, train and equip church leaders, lay and ordained, in their communication skills. It had a particular emphasis on preaching, apologetics, and working with the mass media. It staged an annual Durham Preaching Conference, as well as many other training events and symposia on a variety of subjects. Through additional project funding I was commissioned to edit a book of essays by preachers writing about their experience.<sup>5</sup> While in Durham I completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education which included a project examining conceptions of learning preaching held by students training for Anglican and Methodist ministries. The culmination of the Centre’s work in many respects was the VOX Project (2004), a study of the provision in theological education and

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Catherine Hilker, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps the ‘least worst’ term for it. I maintain when pressed that there is no communication that may be identified as intrinsically Christian, there are only Christians who communicate (or fail to communicate) with truth, grace and charity, as well as effectiveness, sensitivity and skill.

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys* (London: Darton Longman Todd, 2006).

programmes for ministerial formation of training in preaching, apologetics and media skills. I believe that virtually all of these experiences and projects feed directly or indirectly into this research project, for at the heart of it I am asking the question I have asked for years, how can the church find what it so sorely needs, better preaching from better preachers in order to make God known?

## **Cultural context**

At the beginning of this study I also need to recognise and outline the challenges facing preaching and the training of preachers. Learning to preach is certainly daunting, and I have seldom met in my homiletics classes an over-confident student who had also thought deeply about the issues. But preaching itself has become culturally very difficult. Here in Britain in the early twenty-first century it sometimes seems that preaching and the preacher's self-identity are virtually under assault. It does not take an extreme sceptic to question whether preaching as a ministry in the church is still worth doing, especially in denominations where sermons grow shorter and a preacher's words seem less and less valued.<sup>6</sup> Leander Keck, Professor of Biblical Theology at Yale Divinity School, summed up a prevalent mood about preaching in the USA:

If something is worth communicating, don't spoil it by preaching it! Let it emerge in the give-and-take of the group; celebrate it by music, dance or drama. In preaching, people are as passive as chickens on a roost – and perhaps just as awake.<sup>7</sup>

The supposed difficulty of preaching today has been attributed to the problem of the preacher's authority,<sup>8</sup> a crisis in listening brought on by television,<sup>9</sup> the 'turn to the visual' and epistemological changes in the use of language,<sup>10</sup> leading to, as American homiletics professor Fred Craddock put it, "a minimization of the power of words to effect anything."<sup>11</sup> Some see the demise of preaching in the form of emerging church

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<sup>6</sup> In his introduction "A moron speaks to mutes" David Day gives a wry, if downbeat summary of popular and pew attitudes to preaching today in David V. Day, *A Preaching Workbook* (London: SPCK /Lynx, 1998), pp. 1-4. A current favourite aphorism of mine is "Preaching is the only public event at which sleep is socially acceptable" Joseph R. Jeter, 'Cultivating Historical Vision', in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, ed. by T.G. Long and L.T. Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, Rev. edn (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Discussed in Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), pp. 15-18.

<sup>10</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002). See also Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Craddock, *As One without Authority*, p. 6.

models where proclamation happens through PowerPoint presentations, witnessing is blogged on-line, and teaching is shared in user-friendly supper parties preceded by a short DVD and finished with coffee and dessert.<sup>12</sup> As sermons in services of worship diminish in length and frequency, so do opportunities for the inexperienced preacher to learn the craft, and this in turn quite possibly contributes to a further decline in standards.

The charges against preaching as being neither especially effective nor particularly biblical have been well-rehearsed by Norrington, Runia and others.<sup>13</sup> Indeed preaching, which so often works in a teaching mode, appears to have been caught out by advances in educational ‘best practice.’ Thus Joanna Cox, national Adult Education Advisor for the Church of England, wrote:

Widespread experience within the church suggests that preaching and ‘telling’ are the dominant educational approach, and many have overlooked the need to train facilitators who can use processes that encourage others to engage actively with learning.<sup>14</sup>

These charges are not without weight, and they combine with a low view of preaching in many mainline British churches to present a significant challenge to the ways in which preaching is learned.<sup>15</sup>

Traditionally a preacher in the Protestant denominations of the UK receives or experiences a call or vocation, often to a broader, full-time ministry to the church. Accompanying this (commonly, but by no means in every case) is an interior sense of mission to communicate aspects of divine truth, again traditionally expressed and

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<sup>12</sup> See also Richard Lischer, *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> See David C. Norrington, *To Preach or Not to Preach?* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996) for a critique centring on whether the monologue is the most effective way of achieving aims of adult religious education. See Klaas Runia, *The Sermon under Attack* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), and Jeremy Thomson, *Preaching as Dialogue: Is the Sermon a Sacred Cow?* (Cambridge: Grove, 1996) who criticise the monologue form of preaching on theological grounds.

<sup>14</sup> Joanna Cox, ‘Readers - Learning to Help Others to Learn’, *The Reader*, 103 (2006), p. 17. Cited by Stephen Wright in Geoffrey Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright, *Preaching with Humanity* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> It is worth reflecting that the ‘crisis of our preaching’ is by no means a new phenomenon, and that preaching cannot be separated from the Good News or gospel that is its content. Thus Richard Lischer reminds us that “most every reform movement in the church whether Franciscan, Dominican, Lollard, Brethren, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Methodist, has meant not only a revival of preaching but a re-forming of its method of presentation” (Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. xvi). Similarly in this work I do not hold that experiments in form or new rhetorical devices or somehow ‘doing it better,’ will rescue preaching from its malaise and current disfavour. Always preachers must ask what Lischer calls the “integrated, theological question: What is it about the *gospel* that demands this particular expression?” (Ibid., p. xvi).

contained within doctrinal formulations. The training of the preacher has been practised principally as the project of schooling him (so often male in the past) in the foundation and the complexities of the faith, that he may be in every utterance orthodox, or at the very least know enough to avoid the heretical. Communication issues such as rhetoric and public speaking have been recognised, if at all, as secondary, or else they are assumed to have been mastered as part of a good education.<sup>16</sup> The preacher is ‘schoolled’ – he has wide knowledge and a deep understanding of the faith – and his congregation, by contrast is *unschooled*, needing instruction, reproof, admonishment, encouragement and building up, in greater and lesser degrees.

In reality, such a traditional picture is greatly eroded in many parts of the western ‘secularised’ democracies. The authority assumed by the preacher and granted by the congregation no longer exists to the same degree. The preacher is a fellow traveller, who by virtue of having travelled a little further on the road, may return as a guide to point the way, or just to suggest, without threat or compulsion, a route for other pilgrims wishing to aim for a similar end point. He or she can also be a companion who shares stories and sustenance, a supporter to the weak and faltering, and an imager helping the discouraged and disheartened re-imagine their futures.<sup>17</sup>

This affects their preaching, and how they learn to preach. No longer the unquestioned dispensers of Truth or truths, no longer automatically accorded high status and an educator’s role in the local community, they cannot know entirely what they will preach until they are in relationship with their listeners, and aware of their cultural context, their needs and their questions. These listeners in turn are increasingly located in a pluralist, fragmented, and media-saturated society. They tend to attend particular churches less and less because of geographical proximity

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<sup>16</sup>As O.C. Edwards wrote: “Brilioth and the Fathers together reminded me that all the great preachers of the early church had been trained as professional rhetoricians before their ordination. That drove me to Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian.” (O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), p. xix.) His citation of Brilioth is Yngve Torgny Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching*, trans. K.E. Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> I explore the implications for the student preacher of viewing the preacher as guide, storyteller and imager in ch. 4 ‘The Human Preacher’ in Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching with Humanity*, pp. 41-55. This owes much to Walter Brueggemann’s call for preaching as a process of “re-imagination”. See Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd edn. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). Also see his essay, ‘An Imaginative “Or”’ in David Day, Jeff Astley et al., eds., *A Reader on Preaching* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). A discussion of metaphors for the preacher will be part of my search in this chapter for a definition of preaching.

and the parish system and more out of shared spirituality, theological position, taste in worship, cultural interests and social background.<sup>18</sup>

The greatest shift in homiletics in the twentieth century was the “turn towards the listener”<sup>19</sup> which derives from the recognition of what the listener brings to the interpretation and meaning of any act of communication. This has been seen as reflecting the epistemological shift in the transition from modernity’s truth claims to postmodernity’s basic stance of hermeneutical suspicion.<sup>20</sup> It is why the truth that is preached is in important respects *situated in context*, even if it is not completely a social construct, as an extreme post-modern epistemology will insist.<sup>21</sup> Admitting some of the insights of deconstructionist and post-modern interpretations of knowledge David Lose, Professor of Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary wrote: “patterns of making meaning are inevitably mediated through a community” and he advocates seeing the congregation as partner with the preacher in a conversation to discern truth.<sup>22</sup> This leads him in a later work to commend dialogical approaches to teaching preaching among other pedagogical approaches arising from “learning-centred, practice-oriented approaches to teaching and learning.”<sup>23</sup> There are key ideas here that I will examine and develop in chapters 3 and 4.

The provisional nature of such truth does not of course sit well with conservative orthodoxy, and a ‘higher’ or more traditionally dogmatic position takes Christian truth as given and unquestionable, but may see such sermon conversation as Lose advocates within the church as an important way of maintaining the plausibility of

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<sup>18</sup> Changing patterns in UK church attendance are studied in Peter Brierley, *Steps to the Future: What We Need to Know before We Can Think Strategically About the Church's Future in Britain* (London: Christian Research and Scripture Union, 2000), and in Philip J. Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998). I briefly discuss the related area of congregational studies and how it affects the minister’s role in my concluding chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald J. Allen, ‘The Turn toward the Listener: A Selective Review of a Recent Trend in Preaching’, *ENCOUNTER*, 64 (2003). See also Richard L. Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002). This is a very useful map-making exercise identifying important trends in American homiletics.

<sup>20</sup> Famously encapsulated by Lyotard’s “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Jean-François Lyotard, Geoffrey Bennington et al., *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxiv).

<sup>21</sup> Maintaining such a position provisionally, one would hope.

<sup>22</sup> David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2003), p. 92. A linear model of communication is critiqued also by Don M. Wardlaw, ‘Preaching as the Interface of Two Social Worlds: The Congregation as Corporate Agent in the Act of Preaching’ in Arthur Van Seters, *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology & Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> David J. Lose, ‘Teaching Preaching’, in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, ed. by T.G. Long and L.T. Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 44.

that truth.<sup>24</sup> How the preacher understands the ‘truth’ that he or she is handling or discerning will determine not only their approaches to preaching, but also the kinds of sources and influences they seek, whether actively or unconsciously in order to learn preaching.

### ***Preliminary educational questions***

Just as there is no magic way to convert iron into gold, there is no magic way to convert an inexperienced student into a mature preacher.<sup>25</sup>

This dissertation then is about the processes of learning in the formation of preachers. It is not homiletics in the usual sense of the content to be learned or the skills to be mastered or the spirituality to be developed. Rather I am studying what contributes to or inhibits that learning and what factors contribute to the acquisition of skills, knowledge and self-identity that combine to make a preacher. I ask several questions in this respect.

### **Where does learning preaching happen?**

The first question derives from what common sense may suggest: the best growth is natural growth. Although preaching ability can sometimes be developed and enhanced through teaching, far more seems to happen to grow the preacher outside of formal educational and institutional structures, through practice week on week and through accumulated life experience. As I uncover in chapter 7, where I analyse a set of preachers’ autobiographical essays, formative influences may be traced back in many cases to childhood as well as to early experiences that affect both the sense of personal calling and the internal models of what good preaching sounds and looks like. Influences also persist into the present for many preachers, especially those who maintain that they are still learning to preach and that becoming a preacher is a life-long project.

### **How is learning preaching adult learning?**

My second question seeks to uncover the implications of the fact that nearly all preachers consciously learning or trying to learn to preach are adult learners. This means that they are, on most accounts of the characteristics of adult learners, ‘self-directed’ in their learning. They take charge in significant ways of their learning

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<sup>24</sup> See Duncan MacLaren, *Mission Implausible: Restoring Credibility to the Church* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> William T. Pyle and Mary Alice Seals, *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. xi.

experiences, with research, practice, reflection, problem solving and negotiation of their learning context guided by their own judgement. This happens over long sections of their educational trajectory as preachers. An exclusive focus on the teaching of preaching can miss much that contributes to learning for adult preachers.

In this study I am seeking to investigate those processes with particular reference to the location of preaching within a social situation, as an activity carried out in a community context and with a set of understandings corporately held and going back in some cases to the birth of the church. It is true of course that the typical church sermon as planned and preached is almost always presented by a single man or woman, but this is not a solo activity, for, as I will argue, it is the community of listeners who, along with mentors and role models, shape the preacher and her or his work.

### **Is learning preaching human or divine?**

My third question drives me to examine the nature of the intellectual and academic project in the light of divine agency that is part of preaching. Scottish Professor James S. Stewart (1896-1990) in his Warrack Lectures gave this example of the presence of God in a sermon:

Ernest Raymond, novelist and essayist, has described the most impressive sermon he ever heard. In itself, he relates, the sermon was ordinary enough: intellectually negligible, aesthetically ragged. Its construction was faulty, its delivery abominable. Yet its effect was overwhelming... 'I think he spoke for an hour, and not a man of us moved, and most of us were very quiet all that night...'

Stewart then puts his finger on the mystery of the endeavour:

It is one thing to learn the technique and mechanics of preaching, it is quite another to preach a sermon that will draw back the veil and make the barriers fall that hide the face of God.<sup>26</sup>

With a not dissimilar evocation of the divine touch upon the preacher the great English Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) wrote:

The sermon itself is the main thing ... the sacred anointing upon the preacher, and the divine power applying the truth to the hearer ... these are infinitely more important than any details of manner.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), pp. 100-101.

<sup>27</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1954), p. 272.

Fortunately for generations of Baptist preachers coming after him, Spurgeon lectured and taught extensively on details of preparation, delivery and manner, in order to help his students do what they could about the ‘non-divine’ part of the process. The non-divine part of the process that comprises the creation, crafting and delivery of the words of the sermon is normally identified as rhetoric. Teachers of preaching from Augustine onwards have recognised the desirability, and indeed the inevitability of employing the tools of effective speechmaking that derive from the classical schools of rhetoric of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the extent to which the making of the preacher and the sermon event depend on God’s agency requires a theological investigation into the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching.<sup>29</sup> This is also recognised by Fred Craddock, in his now classic textbook on preaching, widely used in American seminaries. In his Introduction he addresses the difficulty of defining preaching for the purposes of learning:

Preaching is the concerted engagement of one’s faculties of body, mind and spirit. It is then, skilled activity. But preaching has to do with a particular content, a certain message conveyed’ ... And since the basic content is not a creation of, but a gift to, the speaker, preaching is both learned and given... for the active presence of the spirit of God transforms the occasion into what biblical scholars have referred to as an “event”.<sup>30</sup>

Many experienced preachers will recognise this ‘given-ness’ that can transform what Craddock calls “activity plus content” into an event where God is present to his

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<sup>28</sup> The legacy of these classical schools to preaching is well described in Lucy Lind Hogan, *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 19-22. A good summary may also be found in Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, pp. 11-14. The most comprehensive contemporary work on the subject of rhetoric is probably George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (London: Croom Helm, 1980). He also examines Augustine’s appropriation of the classical schools of rhetoric.

<sup>29</sup> There is no shortage of pneumatological material on preaching. As John Woodhouse, Principal of Sydney Theological College and writing from a Reformed Protestant perspective, observed: “The fact that the Spirit of God and the Word of God are intimately related in the Bible has been widely recognized, and has had an important place in theological understanding. Certainly it was important for Luther and Calvin in the Reformation period. But, as such, it is not a distinctively Protestant theme in theology; the link between the two is too obvious in Scripture for that.” (John R. W. Stott, Christopher Green et al., *When God’s Voice Is Heard: The Power of Preaching*, New edn (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), p. 46.) I also note that Allan Demond in his discussion of divine agency and ‘the spiritual strand’ in preaching commends Vincent Leoh, ‘A Pentecostal Preacher as an Empowered Witness’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 9 (2006). (Allan G. Demond, ‘Teaching Preaching: Rehabilitating Imitative Practice with Insights from Donald Schön’ (Dissertation, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2007), pp. 43-52.) For an American Pentecostal perspective see also James Forbes. *The Holy Spirit & Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 17.



people. God's presence in the event cannot be commanded, engineered, nor anticipated with certainty.<sup>31</sup>

For my project, to discern patterns in learning to preach, I must then acknowledge a deeply provisional area, where learning sits with patient acquiescence to wait for that which cannot be controlled, taught, inculcated or invoked. I recognise the wisdom of those many preachers and homileticians who pay close attention to the spiritual formation of the preacher, and of those who maintain that unless God is choosing to be present to his people in the preached word, no amount of rhetorical techniques can provide a substitute.

### **Can learning preaching be studied socially?**

A concern with the social aspects of learning to preach has led me on a different track. My investigation has been into how preachers say they have developed through imitation and practice, into the effect on them of role models, mentors and peers, and into the ways in which identity and vocation are shaped by the community of which the preacher is a member. In my empirical work I have concentrated on discernable, phenomenological factors, such as the preacher's sense of vocation, his or her understanding of the influence of mentors and role models, and reflection on her or his preparation for the preaching event. These factors have been described and analysed largely in the language of the social scientist rather than that of the theologian. This is in no way to propose or to privilege any kind of alternative or more 'scientific' explanation of the formation of preachers. If I am not addressing the theological issues alluded to previously, it is because I am addressing the educator's role and concerns. As a homiletical educator I am not operating *outside* the theological arena, but within it and circumscribed by it, and yet I require a discourse that has its own concerns and internal coherence.<sup>32</sup> In fact as will become obvious I

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<sup>31</sup> In his introduction Lischer notes that there was a perennially debated issue relating to the balance between human and divine activity in conversion, but that this "seldom comes up in contemporary homiletics" (Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. xv). Since the question of human instrumentality versus divine action is central to so many theological debates from Augustine's controversy with Pelagius onwards, it is tempting to observe that its absence in some contemporary homiletics may indicate a lack of expectation that there will be a divine presence at all. At the other end of the scale are the 'neo-Barthians' who share something of the view that homiletical technique is all but ancillary to God's action in revealing his Word. Barth's position is well rehearsed, appreciated and critiqued in William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> To a degree I am invoking Stephen Jay Gould's principle of 'Non Overlapping Magisteria' which he explains thus: "the magisterium of science covers the empirical realm: what the Universe is made of (fact) and why does it work in this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry." (Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001).)

am assuming many and various theological positions as the context for the study of preaching, and I will seek to make these clear along the way.

### ***Towards a definition of preaching***

“Praedicato verbi Dei est verbum Dei”<sup>33</sup>

One difficulty in identifying factors in learning to preach arises from the plethora of forms and varieties of approaches to preaching that exist, even within British mainline Protestant denominations. A second difficulty arises from the range of historical understandings and theologies of preaching represented by these different practices. Yet learning anything, as Socrates attempted to demonstrate to Meno in the Dialogue quoted at the beginning of this chapter, requires an understanding of its nature.<sup>34</sup> Later on in this thesis it will become apparent from the responses of survey participants that there are variations of understanding and emphasis. These differences in understanding will naturally have significantly affected the way the respondents and interviewees consider that they have learned or are learning to preach. Here I want to examine some of the most significant views of the nature of preaching that affect learning to preach today. I must beware of venturing into an area that is outside of the purpose of my research, and will not therefore undertake an exhaustive overview of the extensive homiletical literature available to the student preacher.<sup>35</sup>

Before attempting a definition, I make two observations. Firstly, I do not propose in this work to differentiate substantially between a sermon and a homily. Different Christian traditions use the two words in different ways, and occasionally interchangeably. Roman Catholic practice invariably speaks of the homily that is to be delivered in preparation of the congregation for Mass. Reformed Protestants will (usually) deliver sermons in a teaching manner. But in homiletical theory these practical usage differences break down and I have not found a satisfactory and universal distinction. The great majority of the participants and contributors to my research indicate that ‘sermons’ are what they deliver when they are preaching, so

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<sup>33</sup> “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.” From the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) by Heinrich Bullinger and translated in William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> Plato, ‘Meno’, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> An excellent survey of historical understandings of preaching may be found in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*. Also see John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), pp. 15-49. This was published in the US as *Between Two Worlds* (1982). Joseph R. Jeter Jr also makes the case for understanding earlier definitions of preaching in his chapter ‘Cultivating Historical Vision’ in Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), pp. 149-169.

that is the term that I shall use. Where a ‘homily’ is being discussed in a manner that indicates that learning to deliver a homily might be different from learning to preach, I will draw whatever distinctions are necessary at that point.

Secondly, preaching is obviously practiced very differently in different churches and traditions across Britain. The energetic and vivid, emotionally-charged and interactive call-and-response preaching found in an African-Caribbean church could not look and feel more different from some of the highly nuanced, sometimes provisional, and often cerebral reflections preached to white, educated, middle class congregations in Anglican and Presbyterian churches. The revivalist preacher who reportedly described his preparation for preaching, “First I reads myself full, then I thinks myself straight, then I prays myself hot, then I lets myself go” would seem to have learned to do something quite different from the young Methodist preachers or Church of Scotland ministers whom I surveyed for this research. It is unlikely that a single definition will serve for all the varieties of preaching found in the church. Let us consider what are the necessary understandings of preaching for this work, and how they are derived from traditions and practices of the church.

### **New Testament preaching**

“Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach (κηρύσσω) unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”<sup>36</sup>

Paul’s deductive exposition leads straight to the idea that faithful preachers are central to the nature of the gospel of salvation. Indeed, O.C. Edwards, in his magisterial *A History of Preaching* states in his opening chapter that “there is no activity more characteristic of the church than preaching” and that “most Christian bodies consider the proclamation of the Word of God to be the constitutive act of the church.”<sup>37</sup> There is no point in doubting the importance of preaching to the church since its inception, although there has of course been an ebb and flow in this respect, with both dry periods of lacklustre, uninspired preaching and periods of revival or renewal of preaching.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Romans 10:13

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Craddock addresses the question of whether the minor role of preaching instruction in some seminaries is the “cause of a poor pulpit” and reminds the reader that “seminaries not only create but

Most Christian theologies of preaching will trace their lineage to the spoken ministry of Christ and to Paul's public ministry as it is recorded in the New Testament.<sup>39</sup> Thus there are in the New Testament nearly 30 Greek words that may be or at some point have been translated into English using the single word 'preaching'. Here I mention four of the most prominent that have grounded theories and fuelled debates. The most common word for preaching is διδάσκω (didasko), which occurs 97 times. It refers to teaching (or sometimes to things taught) and is often translated as 'to teach.' There are 61 occurrences of the word κηρύσσω (kerusso), and they carry the sense of a herald, formally and with authority proclaiming in public matter of great import. The word from which we derive evangelism εὐαγγελίζω (euaggelizo) occurs 55 times, and its meaning is along the lines of 'to declare good news.' There are 13 occurrences of διαλέγομαι (dialegomai). This word carries the sense of to converse and to reason with, and from it is derived the English word 'dialogue'.

The oratorical activity represented by these words took place in a variety of New Testament settings and owed their origin to a range of contemporary practices. Surveying the preaching forms of the early church, Joseph R. Jeter Jr remarks that:

The synagogue sermon, the Greek homily, the apology, the polemic, liturgical preaching, epideictic, and other forms were all used to advantage. The preachers, as the need arose, were called to herald, to spread good news, to proclaim, to bear witness, to speak, to challenge, to tell, to persuade, to teach, to console, to exhort, to argue, to command, to prophesy, to speak in a tongue, to interpret, to discourse, to deliver a tradition, to train, to bless, and so forth.<sup>40</sup>

Jeter is indicating that it would be wrong to confine the nature of true preaching to this or that New Testament expression, when the essential missionary activity poured forth in a great variety of forms. Nevertheless, some categorising can be useful. Thomas Groome's interpretation and distillation of this diffusion of meaning and plethora of practice is instructive:

The New Testament uses separate terms for evangelizing, preaching, and teaching, but they clearly overlap, never exclude one another, and constitute together 'the ministry of the word.' Over time *evangelizing* came to refer to announcing the core of the "good news" to would-be Christian converts, *preaching* to

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reflect the general condition of the churches they serve and the cultures in which they live." (Craddock, *As One without Authority*, p. 5.) This needs to be borne in mind when we come to discuss institutional training towards the end of this chapter.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Mark 1:21, 2:13, 4:2, Matthew 4:23, 9:35, Luke 13:22, John 13:13, to choose from over 70 verses from the four gospels.

<sup>40</sup> Jeter, 'Cultivating Historical Vision'.

designate a spiritual reflection on scripture and especially in a liturgical context with people already Christians or with catechumens becoming Christians, and *teaching* to describe the in-depth instruction and formation of people in the way of life and wisdom that is lived Christian faith.<sup>41</sup>

The three categories that Groome defends and defines are a variation on a traditional dichotomy in the understanding of preaching that has been often rehearsed as the difference between preaching as proclamation and preaching as instruction.

### **Preaching as proclamation and as instruction**

Arguably the first textbook written for Christian preachers is Book 4 of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. Michael Pasquarello, "taking *doctrina* in the active rather than passive sense," translates this as "Teaching Christianity."<sup>42</sup> Augustine is concerned with conversion and Christian formation, and reveals "his strong commitment to the life-shaping wisdom of Scripture for the church and especially its preachers."<sup>43</sup> His aim is the transformation of the preacher through teaching in order that the preacher may teach in a way that leads to transformation.

The twelfth century Cistercian scholar and religious, Alan of Lille began his *Compendium* with a definition of preaching (noted by James J. Murphy as "the first formal definition in the 1200 year history of the church"<sup>44</sup>):

Preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behaviour, whose purpose is the forming of men.<sup>45</sup>

At first glance this also seems to regard preaching as a form of teaching, and indeed if as he says it "derives from the path of reason," one can well imagine a resulting preoccupation with inculcating principles and the use of catechetical methods of instruction. The question, was preaching in the early church primarily proclamatory, a heralding of good news, or was it educational, an instruction in Christian living, was at the heart of C.H. Dodd's 1936 work *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*.<sup>46</sup> In it he drew a sharp distinction between the proclaimed *kerygma* of

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry; the Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p. 301.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Pasquarello, *Sacred Rhetoric: Preaching as a Theological and Pastoral Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> James Jerome Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1974, p307). Cited in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Alanus de Insulis, *Ars Praedicandi: The Art of Preaching*, trans. G.R. Evans, Vol. No 23 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1981), p. 15. Cited in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, pp. 3-7.

<sup>46</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments: Three Lectures with an Appendix on Eschatology and History* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936).

the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and the *didache* or instruction, asserting as Richard Lischer puts it, “only the former belonged to the preaching of the primitive church.”<sup>47</sup> The distinction is useful, but is difficult to sustain in common church usage of the term ‘preaching’. Clearly the ministries of teaching and proclamation overlap in the functioning of ordained ministers of today’s mainline denominations, despite the differences that have grown up between them in some parts of the church, and the different gifting or talent that may in practice be necessary to operate effectively in each of these modes.

## Refining the person and distilling the truth

The importance to preaching of the personal attributes and virtues of the preacher has ebbed and flowed in homiletics. Professor James Henry Harris, writing of African – American preaching, notes that in preaching there is “the projection of the authentic being of the preacher.”<sup>48</sup> One of the most commonly quoted definitions of preaching today was first given by the late nineteenth century American Episcopal preacher and writer Phillips Brooks. He said in his *Lectures on Preaching*: “Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men [*sic*]” and “Truth through personality is our description of real preaching.”<sup>49</sup> As the pre-eminent American homiletician Thomas G. Long points out in his recent book edited with Leonora Tubbs Tisdale this definition had “staggering” implications for the teaching of preaching, leading to something of a dualism in the training of preachers. On the one hand was the idea of doctrinal truth, the “timeless message of Christianity” learned systematically through dogmatics and biblical study. The significance of Brooks’ definition lay in highlighting the importance on the other hand of the personality of the preacher, so that “the development of the preacher was the responsibility of the teacher of preaching and the focal point of homiletics.”<sup>50</sup>

But is that development to be focussed on techniques and skills that may be acquired, through teaching or observation and imitation, or on the moulding of the preacher’s character, catholicity and holiness? In practice they are complementary, and both have their advocates. Not many years after Brooks’ Beecher Lectures, current books available for the instruction of preachers were reviewed in the *Harvard Theological*

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<sup>47</sup> Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> James H. Harris, *The Word Made Plain: The Power and Promise of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (1877). *Foreword and Biographical Information by Warren Wiersbe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1989), p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, p. 8.

*Review* of July 1913. The writer notes, for instance, books which analyse and classify sermon types and which he finds artificial and not very helpful for the average student. Hale also notes a class of books “the aim of which is not so much to instruct the minister as to quicken his spiritual life.”<sup>51</sup> This tension between the spirituality of the preacher and the rhetorical training of the preacher continues to surface in homiletics, as Canadian minister Allan Demond notes in a very useful and comprehensive typology of preaching instruction. He concludes his discussion on the spiritual (as distinct from the technical) formation of the preacher:

Homileticians who give priority to the spiritual strand of learning are likely to give their attention to exhortation, formation or (as in the case of Barthian homiletics) non-intervention. Thus the spiritual strand of homiletic learning makes only modest claims for expanding our capacity to teach preaching. Generally speaking, while the spiritual strand is theologically and practically valid, it is educationally weak.<sup>52</sup>

Long maintains that the emphasis on the person of the preacher, characteristic of a number of nineteenth century definitions of preaching, resulted in a backlash that found form in Karl Barth’s focus on the sovereign Word of God in the sermon:

Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission.<sup>53</sup>

Everything hinges on the process of biblical interpretation, and therefore, as Long notes, “homiletics pedagogically melds into biblical hermeneutics”<sup>54</sup> and the training of preachers will be concerned with biblical studies rather than the mechanics of delivery, the form of the message or its cultural context.

An example of this comes out in this definition of expository preaching given by the theologically conservative American homiletician Haddon Robinson:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy

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<sup>51</sup> Edward Hale, 'Recent Books on Preaching and Preachers', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 6 (1913), p. 362.

<sup>52</sup> Demond, 'Teaching Preaching', p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Barth and Gunter Seyfferth, *Homiletics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley and D.E. Daniels, 1st edn (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, p. 9.

Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.<sup>55</sup>

In order to emphasise the agency of God and the centrality of scripture to the endeavour, this definition virtually disregards rhetorical issues. How the concept will be communicated is a secondary concern at best. The duty of the preacher is focussed on the study of the text, and the confidence of the preacher lies in the belief that this is the most reliable way to open the door for God. As Greg Haslam, currently Senior Pastor at Westminster Chapel, London writes: “As preachers it is vital that we have clear and settled in our mind the fact that God has spoken, that we have a word from above that has come to us from outside ourselves.”<sup>56</sup> Beyond that, any significant and worthy effect and application of the sermon will be the work of the Holy Spirit. This tension between refining the person (technically or spiritually) and understanding the Word of God continues to feature largely in the education and formation of preachers, and must be reflected in our definition of preaching.

## **Recognising the social dimension of preaching**

Whatever the preacher may think about his or her autonomous work as a mouthpiece of God’s word, a full description of a preaching event must also recognise the social dimensions. O.C. Edwards’ definition of preaching is as follows:

A speech delivered in a Christian assembly for worship by an authorized person that applies some point of doctrine, usually drawn from a biblical passage, to the lives of the members of the congregation with purpose of moving them by the use of narrative analogy and other rhetorical devices to accept that application and to act on the basis of it.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Haslam, “Authority in Preaching” in Greg Haslam, ed., *Preach the Word!* (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 2006), p. 246.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, p. 5. Edwards notes that this version of his definition “seeks to make it general enough to include the preaching that occurs in non-Christian religion” (ibid., p.22, in the footnote to the definition given above). This usefully allows him for most of the rest of the chapter to examine precursors to the Christian sermon in Jewish synagogue sermons and in Graeco-Roman rhetoric. Regarding synagogue sermons, however, he points out that there is not sufficient evidence to demonstrate the direct influence of them upon early Christian homilies, and indeed that “the oldest synagogue sermons that have been passed down are very different from any Christian sermons” (ibid., p.10). His carefully nuanced conclusion is that sermonic practice in the synagogues seems to have given the Christians the pattern for speech that was a) instructive in the context of worship and b) based upon biblical passages.

Classical Greek and Roman understandings of rhetoric were in their way equally powerful forces in shaping the early Christian understanding of the sermon, and Edwards goes on in the chapter to give a very useful introduction and concise summary of the “concepts and vocabulary that will recur in the history of Christian preaching,” (ibid., p.12). As will be seen, preaching seems to have been learned by the UK preachers I have studied without noteworthy reference either to early Jewish practice or to



Here we have the externally observable event, “a speech” along with socially-oriented descriptives such as “authorized person” and “in a Christian assembly.” We see intentions and motivations in “with purpose of moving them” and we discern communicational aspects of what we can call the ‘shared making of meaning’ through the phrases “applies some point,” “rhetorical devices” and “to accept that application and to act.” A minister learning to preach in the light of this definition will do well to pay attention to many things along the way. Would he or she be perhaps more of a Martha to Haddon Robinson’s Mary, mindful of the ‘one thing’ that is God’s word in the scriptural text? Certainly it would seem that there is the potential for very different learning trajectories, as I will examine in the empirical studies.

Although I have not studied Roman Catholic priests in my empirical work, the shared heritage with Protestant practices makes their institutional perspective on preaching important for our understanding. The following definition from *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* emphasises the corporate nature of the act more than most. It states that the homily is:

...a scriptural interpretation of human existence which enables a community to recognize God’s active presence, to respond to that presence in faith through liturgical word and gesture, and beyond the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the Gospel.<sup>58</sup>

Homilies in this tradition will not be true to such a definition without the priest’s profound understanding of scripture, human existence and the ways of God. He must also, on this definition, be profoundly sensitive to the community in which he is called to preach.

## **Preaching according to David Buttrick**

The American homiletician David Buttrick, writing as, in his words “a Protestant of the Reformed tradition,” produced in 1985 the profound and exhaustive analytical work *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. In this he does not attempt a simple definition of preaching, but he notes that his approach is phenomenological in that he is concerned with “the way language forms in human consciousness.”<sup>59</sup> Thus he

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the constructs of classical rhetoric. It is my hope that the relegation of these ideas to a footnote in the present day practice of British preaching is only temporary.

<sup>58</sup> Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* (Washington, DC: Office of Publishing Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1982), p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. xii.

begins by describing preaching in terms of ‘naming’ and ‘narration’.<sup>60</sup> By naming he refers to the human activity of “naming into consciousness” the shared truths by which we interpret, understand and even experience reality. Preaching can name truthfully or it can lie. It can refuse to name or it can fail to name (and thus encourage for better or worse doing ‘theology from silence’).

Narration for Buttrick is language used to similar meaning-making purpose as naming, but he is recognising the fundamental nature of story to enable identity, or sense of place in the world. As a narrative enterprise, preaching not only “tells a story with a transcendent dimension,” but can also tell personal or congregational story / stories in a way that, for example “transforms identity by adding a new beginning to our stories.”<sup>61</sup> This understanding of the preaching enterprise is important to this work for its emphasis on the social-linguistic nature of preaching. In other words a sermon may be seen as a negotiated event that takes place within a community and which has explanatory power to constitute the community.

## Metaphors for the preacher

Another useful way of coming to a nuanced understanding of the nature of preaching in the church today is to look at current metaphors that have been proposed for the preacher. Combining *kerygma* and *didache* in the present day office of the preacher, the widely admired and respected evangelical Anglican preacher John Stott (b. 1921) relates the view of the preacher as Herald and Steward as follows:

The Christian preacher is both steward and herald. Indeed the good news he is to herald is contained within the Word of which he is steward, for the Word of God is essentially the record and interpretation of God’s redemptive deed in and through Christ. The Scriptures bear witness to Christ, the only Saviour of sinners. Therefore, a good steward of the Word is bound to be also a zealous herald of the good news of salvation in Christ.<sup>62</sup>

‘Steward’ is a rich metaphor and serves Stott’s purpose well, for it combines a sense of guardianship and a strict responsibility with the duty to administer it appropriately, or in other words to teach. Stott’s other metaphors in this instructive volume are ‘Witness’, ‘Father’, and ‘Servant’. Stott expounds the view of the preacher as Father – not it must be said in a recognisably Roman Catholic or Orthodox understanding of the priest when he is addressed as ‘Father’, implying paternal and representative

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 5ff.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait; Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 34.

authority – but with an emphasis on a parent’s affection, expressed in love, understanding, gentleness, and earnestness. This classically evangelical declaration comes from one of the British Anglican church’s most respected preachers, known and celebrated for the brilliance of his expository style of preaching.

The metaphors of Steward, Herald, Father and Servant are also found in the 1980 work by the American Roman Catholic Willard Jabusch.<sup>63</sup> These perhaps indicate a degree of theological congruence in what are usually seen as the more orthodox sectors of the western Christian church.<sup>64</sup> Another important set of metaphors for the preacher, some overlapping with, and some complementary to the aforementioned, are to be found in a book on leadership by Derek Tidball of London School of Theology.<sup>65</sup>

This discussion of metaphors is included here primarily because in the questionnaire I sent to the Church of Scotland ministers, I offered a range of metaphors for the role of the preacher in the life of the church. I shall discuss in chapter 6 the preferences expressed and how I used them to obtain an indication of respondents’ theological understandings of preaching.

## **A functional description**

A final way of approaching an understanding of preaching is to ask what happens in practice, descriptively and from a functional perspective. In preparation for his 1998 textbook on preaching, David Day asked about 50 ministers in the north-east of England for a copy of a recent sermon. From their responses, he was able to identify a standard pattern in most if not quite all of the sermons. This pattern included an opening (to set the scene), some reference to the Bible (which is seen as authoritative), and a moment of “getting personal,” in which a principle drawn from the Bible was explained in terms relevant to the lives of the congregation. There was usually an appeal to act on the message, although this varied greatly in its nature. Finally there was an assumption “always implied and sometimes stated, that this speech was in some sense delivered in the name of God.”<sup>66</sup> There is a somewhat

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<sup>63</sup> Willard Francis Jabusch, *The Person in the Pulpit: Preaching as Caring* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), pp. 15-28.

<sup>64</sup> In his Doctor of Ministry thesis researching priestly identity and the priest’s approach to preaching, Roman Catholic David J. Shea derives the metaphors of the Disciple, the Entertainer, and the Teacher from his data, in David J. Shea, 'Self-Understanding in Catholic Preaching: How the Identity of the Priest Shapes His Approach to Preaching' (Dissertation, Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2006). This leads, as I note in the conclusion of my thesis, to several similar recommendations for the teaching of preaching.

<sup>65</sup> Derek Tidball, *Builders & Fools: Leadership the Bible Way* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Day, *A Preaching Workbook*, p. 4.

encouraging indication here that the core theoretical constructs of the North American homileticians who write most extensively on preaching are embodied in the practice of a typical sample of preachers from the mainline British denominations. It could be that this is an area that is worthy of more extensive empirical research.

### **A definition with a coda**

From these sources, and following these considerations, I suggest as a working definition of preaching for the purposes of this research:<sup>67</sup>

An address in the context of Christian worship with an authority presumed to be from God as revealed in the Bible and Christian tradition, with content based on Scripture and which is attempting (with an expectation of the presence of the Holy Spirit) to make that content relevant and applicable to the lives of the hearers within both the cultural and ecclesial context shared by preacher and hearers.

What this lacks in eloquence will I hope be made up in usefulness. Like any definition, however, this is to say the least a bit dry. What it fails to suggest for me is something of the flavour and energy of good preaching. Rev. Dr Leslie Griffiths, Methodist preacher, broadcaster, and Superintendent Minister of Wesley's Chapel in London, put it once: "Preaching must be passionate, urgent, persuasive, engaging, eye-opening, mind boggling, poetry, prophecy, uplifting and upsetting."<sup>68</sup> It would seem that the African-American Baptist minister, Henry H. Mitchell, cherished similar ideals when he wrote that "The best of gospel preaching is at once proclamation and celebration ... a part of the genius of Black preaching has been its capacity to generate this very kind of celebration, despite the hardest of circumstances."<sup>69</sup> Can preaching like this be learned? What does it take to impress upon a person being called to preach the sense that preaching, if done well, should be some or all of these things? And if so impressed, by what means will that preacher be enabled to preach in these ways? But this leads us to ask what is going on when the church as an institution attempts to train or develop its preachers. Here there has traditionally been a focus on the person of the preacher.

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<sup>67</sup> This is not to say that all respondents and interviewees in the field studies agreed with or would agree with such a definition.

<sup>68</sup> Leslie Griffiths, 'Preaching: A Dying Art?' *The Reader*, 103 (2006), pp. 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 54.

## ***The qualities of a preacher***

Indeed, much homiletical teaching concerns the qualities and character of the preacher, and is for many writers, from Augustine to James S. Stewart a question of their holiness and spirituality. The Dutch theologian Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466 - 1536) wrote:

The preacher should exhibit purity of heart, chastity of body, sanctity of deportment, erudition, wisdom, and above all eloquence worthy of the divine mysteries.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to such high virtues, a rare set of natural abilities may also be seen in the call for “eloquence worthy of the divine mysteries”. In truth our own experience of very good preaching may discourage us, when it seems to derive from gifting and have nothing to do with training. As Tom Long put it:

The more dynamic preachers, the ones people seem most to admire, often appear to have a certain innate flair, a knack for preaching that seems more like a gift than a set of skills. Some of these preachers have never taken a class in preaching, never read a manual on homiletics. Even if they have been formally trained in preaching, they seem more born to the task than instructed in the craft. We admire their abilities, but we wonder for ourselves if the capacity for effective preaching is within our reach. Can we really learn how to preach, or must we be born with the gift?<sup>71</sup>

But there have been great preachers who recognise that there are, in addition, practical, definable, and perhaps even teachable aspects of preaching. Martin Luther outlined nine virtues for the making of a preacher:

A good preacher should have these properties and virtues; first, to teach systematically; secondly, he should have a ready wit; thirdly, he should be eloquent; fourthly, he should have a good voice; fifthly, a good memory; sixthly, he should know where to make an end; seventhly, he should be sure of his doctrine; eighthly, he should venture and engage body and blood, wealth and honour, in the word; ninthly, he should suffer himself to be mocked and jeered of every one.<sup>72</sup>

There is a mixture here of naturally endowed gifts, talents that may be developed and attitudes that may be adopted. The American Congregational pastor Horace Bushnell has been called the “father of modern liberal theology... and one of the most

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<sup>70</sup> Roland Herbert Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 323.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Luther, William Hazlitt et al., *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, New edn (London: H.G. Bohn, 1857), p. 182. The translation of William Hazlitt, edited by Thomas S. Kepler, as originally published by The World Publishing Company, is presently published as a reprint by Baker Books.

significant American theologians of the nineteenth century.”<sup>73</sup> He wrote in 1866 that there were four talents required to make a preacher. These were: “high scholarship”, “a metaphysical and theologic (*sic*) thinking style”, a “talent for expression,” and a “manner and voice for speaking.”<sup>74</sup> Here is a collection of natural aptitudes and abilities, the first two of which may be enhanced by sustained and intensive education, and the second two requiring above average abilities but abilities that may be improved through training and attention.

Continuing his introduction quoted above, Long looks at the gifts required of a preacher:

Preaching requires such gifts as a sensitivity to human need, a discerning eye for the connections between faith and life, an ear attuned to hearing the voice of scripture, compassion, a growing personal faith, and the courage to tell the truth.<sup>75</sup>

None of these one would expect to find in the agreed competencies or learning outcomes of a course on preaching, although to be fair ministerial training of the pastor will name many of them. Long’s prescription for the developing preacher does encourage those who suspect that they are not nor are ever likely to be classed in the “more dynamic preacher” category. He continues:

These qualities cannot be taught in the traditional sense of classroom instruction, but those who possess them can learn much in the classroom about how to exercise them in preaching. There are lessons to be mastered, skills to be honed, processes of sermon development to be explored. In short, there is much about preaching that can be, and must be, learned.<sup>76</sup>

This advocacy for pedagogical instruction in preaching assumes that preaching is something that can be learned, and the preacher is someone who can learn, although the emphasis is again on the individual’s virtues and talents. As I have already argued, such an understanding of the preacher and his or her gifts and abilities does not reveal the full picture. To do that we must consider the location of the preacher and the sermon act in their context. This is helpfully discussed by James Nieman, Professor of Practical Theology at Hartford Seminary in the US. Drawing on contemporary philosophical understandings of ‘practice’, he proposes five frames by which we may analyse and interpret preaching. Preaching can be viewed or framed as an action, and as common, meaningful, strategic and purposive. To say that

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<sup>73</sup> Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. 83.

<sup>74</sup> Horace Bushnell, ‘Pulpit Talent (1866)’, in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p.85.

<sup>75</sup> Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, p. 21.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

preaching is an action, his first frame, goes beyond the obvious with the recognition that actions as Nieman uses the word are part of larger domains of endeavour. Successful performance of such actions depends on cognitive understanding of the domain as well as mastery of appropriate psycho-motor skills derived through practice. To say that actions such as preaching are common, his second frame, is to recognise that they are part of a community's activity, with a "social or collective quality." They are essentially the "product of a group, using group resources and serving group interests, even when they are performed by individuals."<sup>77</sup> He highlights the importance of seeing this common quality as "existing in and across time," for "practices are always traditioned, standing within and in turn shaping the stream of how a group operates."<sup>78</sup>

Thirdly a practice such as preaching is meaningful. This not just to say that a preached message conveys meanings that may be understood, but that there are in addition many overlapping layers of meaning to be discerned in the practice, including the iconic significance of the action itself being performed. Fourthly, the practice of preaching is strategic, which is to say that there are orchestrated and sometimes tightly-scripted techniques involved in the execution of the action. Finally, a practice in his usage is purposive, it has aims and goals, "a forward energy ... a teleological drive that is central to the existence of any practice".<sup>79</sup>

Using this thick description of preaching as practice enables Nieman, Long et al. to view through these 'frames' what must be learned in order to preach. Similarly, my research tries to identify and explore the mechanisms, the processes and the influences which are instrumental in shaping preachers, whatever the style of their delivery or the substance of their doctrine. In particular I will be building on the idea of framing preaching as a common, traditioned, and socially meaningful action as I introduce and discuss the concept of communities of practice in chapter 4.

### ***Homiletics and the training of preachers***

In seeking definitions of preaching, I have already begun to touch on some of the pedagogical implications. Homiletics is something of a Cinderella in the theological curriculum, living "down in the basement," to quote Charles Bartow of Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>80</sup> This is where seminarians who know their Bible and who

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<sup>77</sup> James Nieman, 'Why the Idea of Practice Matters', in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, T.G. Long and L.T. Tisdale, eds, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 22.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> In an interview with the author, 5th November 2002.

have had a grounding in biblical studies, exegesis and systematics are sent to master some communication skills and to find out how to “sugar-coat their educated gospel truths” so that they can be received by ordinary parishioners in the churches they will serve. But at least the training of the preacher in seminaries in the United States is highly developed, with advanced as well as introductory courses, tenured faculty and well-equipped facilities such as dedicated ‘preaching labs.’

In the UK, the home of preaching in the curriculum for students training to serve in UK churches is usually within *pastoralia*, with an emphasis on the practical - that is, if it has a home at all. There are few textbooks written in the UK, and no widely agreed syllabus, and as I revealed in an earlier research project, it is seldom covered in anything more than an introductory way in theological training and ministerial formation within the mainline denominations.<sup>81</sup> I will return to this shortly.

What might be the reasons for this? Reflecting on the theological training in mainline US Protestant seminaries, Walter C. Jackson writes:

For the most part, practical ministry did not achieve a base in the theological academy. Practical ministry skills were either perceived to be God-given gifts, and therefore unable to be learned, or so easy to learn they were taken for granted.<sup>82</sup>

He believes that practical field learning has remained under-emphasised in theological training. Jackson suggests that:

One of the major reasons for the de-emphasis of practical education was the uneasiness of educators with performance-based learning and the integrated, practical intelligence required for successfully acquiring and using it.<sup>83</sup>

At this point Jackson cites Sternberg’s and Wagner’s examination of practical intelligence.<sup>84</sup> The theoretical constructs aiding our understanding of ‘practical intelligence’ – which is a significant part of learning to preach – are addressed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

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<sup>81</sup> These were some of the findings of a research project I conducted with a colleague at Durham University, and published in Geoffrey Stevenson and David Wilkinson, *The Vox Project on 21st Century Communication: A Research Report on the Provision of Training in Preaching, Apologetics and Media* (Durham: Centre for Christian Communication, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> Walter C. Jackson, 'An Introduction to Theological Field Education', in *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach*, ed. by W.T. Pyle and M.A. Seals (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Robert J. Sternberg and Richard K. Wagner, *Practical Intelligence: Nature and Origins of Competence in the Everyday World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).



A second reason for preaching not being taught directly is its “inextricable relation to the other disciplines” of theological education.<sup>85</sup> In my own recent experience teaching in a US seminary I have seen a homiletics course that was apparently successfully offered over a number of years removed from the curriculum so that preaching could be covered within the Biblical Studies department. While on the one hand the integration promised by such a move is welcome, the argument against it derives from the understanding that homiletical communication has as much to do with the cultural space inhabited by speaker and listeners as it does with competent biblical exegesis and orthodox hermeneutics. Furthermore, students in training for ministry need to be able to ask in all subjects being studied, not just the biblical ones, “How can this or that concept be preached?”

When homiletics is in the curriculum, it is seldom subject to the same examination and assessment procedures as Systematics, Ethics or Greek. This has some justification, even apart from the practical difficulties of assessment. A demonstrable ability to preach would seem to involve much more of the person than just their intellectual abilities or, in the terminology of the academy, their abilities to analyse, to synthesise and to integrate knowledge and concepts. To be sure, students are assessed on their preaching ability in many courses, colleges and training schemes, but it is often evaluated in a similar way to their pastoral counselling skills, with formal or informal comments on the performance of an assignment, but without a score or grade that contributes to any degree awarded. One significant risk attendant on not having equal academic status is that the subject does not appear valued by the institution that apparently gives high priority to academic results and awards. Countering this situation would seem to require intentional and pro-active measures to keep preaching in the centre of the life of the formational community. Even here there are difficulties, for this cannot be predicated on a model of residential training that is no longer a dominant pattern for ministerial formation in the UK. It is one of the major exploration areas of this research to look at influences on the developing preacher that extend in time long before and after the course taken in the period of prescribed training prior to ordination or licensing.

Here I refer to the findings from some earlier research into denominational programmes for developing preachers. The VOX Project was a study carried out in 2002 - 2004 by the Centre for Christian Communication while I was Director, and this has served in some ways as a pilot study for this thesis. The focus of the research

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<sup>85</sup> Craddock, *As One without Authority*, p. 4.

was the provision in theological education and programmes for ministerial formation in the UK of training in preaching, apologetics and media skills. It drew on questionnaires to colleges, courses and training schemes, as well as a hosted colloquium of teachers of preaching. The published result was *The Vox Report*.<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that the Centre was located in England and was in its day to day work concerned with providing resources for local clergy and with training Anglican and Methodist candidates for ordained ministry. Consequently if regrettably the data from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was not as full as that obtained from English colleges, courses and training schemes.<sup>87</sup>

The study found that training for preaching ministry was highly variable, with many different approaches and varieties of syllabus, but there was an encouraging sign that virtually all programmes for ministerial training and development required a course of preaching at Level 1 (equivalent to first or second year undergraduate work). It was not always the case, however, that homiletics had the full number of those course hours to itself: quite often it was just one part of a course covering preaching, liturgy and worship together. It was also found that fewer than 1 in 5 institutions offered courses beyond Level 1.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a degree of unanimity among teachers and course organisers about how to teach preaching. The topics that were affirmed by the Report as most appropriate and important for courses to cover were Handling Scripture, Sermon Delivery, Theology of Preaching, and Sermon Evaluation Strategies.<sup>89</sup> These categories give us an idea of how those delivering such courses interpret stated and agreed expectations for training. For Anglican ministers these have been stated as:

Basic understanding of preaching and teaching skills, as well as some assessed preaching experience.<sup>90</sup>

In fact there is little in the Church of England Ministry Division documents to specify how that basic understanding is to be delivered by colleges, leaving such matters to the college curriculum planning and the periodic evaluations by the Ministry Division.

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<sup>86</sup> Stevenson and Wilkinson, *The Vox Project*.

<sup>87</sup> The Centre for Christian Communication was an independently funded project of, and located at St John's College, Durham University.

<sup>88</sup> Geoffrey Stevenson and David Wilkinson, *The Vox Report Summary* (Durham: Centre for Christian Communication, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Stevenson and Wilkinson, *The Vox Project*, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Advisory Board of Ministry, Church of England, *Beginning Public Ministry* (London: Advisory Board of Ministry, 1998), p. 6.

Moving on from the teaching of preaching to learning *in situ*, there were also clear indications that some form of reflection on practice was deemed important by all parties involved in ministerial formation. The Vox Report observed:

Sermon Evaluation Strategies are considered important enough to cover by colleges, Courses and Schemes, whereas the majority of CME directors appear to believe they are best learned with the Training Incumbent.<sup>91</sup>

This had been underlined by the approach recommended by the Ministry Division which specified, as a desirable outcome of post-ordination training the following:

Competence in preaching through increasingly frequent and regular practice, with the assistance of others, including laity, in reflecting on the experience.<sup>92</sup>

This was further developed in the section on the ‘Working Agreement’ between Training Incumbent and Curate:

There should be a regular opportunity to share in the design and leading of worship, and in preaching ... and it is desirable that the curate’s sermons should be reviewed with the incumbent, and with other colleagues and lay people where appropriate.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, the VOX research found that for CME trainers the top three most important factors in helping ordained ministers to improve their preaching were congregational feedback, feedback from mentor, supervisor or training incumbent, and increasing or guarding time spent preparing sermons.<sup>94</sup> This strongly supports educational perspectives affirming that improvement occurs through practice, through reflection on practice, and through planning for better practice, and is an embodiment of the action – reflection – theory cycle that will be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>95</sup>

The appreciation that learning to preach is best seen as part of a minister’s life-long learning is not always evident, as pointed out in the SAFOT report delivered to the Church of England on the structure and funding of theological training:

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<sup>91</sup> Stevenson and Wilkinson, *The Vox Project*, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Church of England, *Beginning Public Ministry: The First Four Years*, p. 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>94</sup> Seventeen trainers in charge of Continuing Ministerial Education for Church of England dioceses returned a targeted questionnaire on what they considered important in ministerial training in preaching, apologetics and media skills.

<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that the least appreciated learning methods were conferences, the study of preaching, and peer feedback. I do not find that this last stands in any significant contradiction to my conclusions regarding peer learning, for the CME directors are speaking of later, rather than early influences on learning preaching. I suspect also that their answers (from a multiple-choice list) are probably reflecting the reality of working life for ministers who are unlikely to have any reliable opportunities to hear another minister preach.

Most initial training will espouse the value of lifelong learning but ordination is such a major transition within the life of the Church that it is easy to think that training is now basically in the past. Further there is little visible connection between the training offered before and after ordination. (We believe there is too much pressure on IME to deliver everything in a frontloaded way combined with a lack of connection with, and coordination of, CME.)<sup>96</sup>

With such pressure is not surprising to find that learning preaching, along with other subjects, is not properly addressed. Nevertheless there are encouraging signs. In a recent Doctor of Ministry dissertation, American Roman Catholic David J. Shea draws his conclusions regarding the ideal role of the homiletics instructor.

At the core of this model for formation is the adoption of certain pedagogies that place instructor and students on a more level playing field, where the primary role of the instructor becomes that of a coach and a trainer, mirroring in many respects the relationship between a coach and his athletes. The instructor opens up the planning of the course so that the definition of objectives, methods, and measurements are collaboratively defined by both instructor and students. Self-directed learning and learner-centered principles are employed foundationally, and the instructor willingly surrenders some of his unilateral control over the course and the classroom.<sup>97</sup>

These recommendations share a common derivation with several of the findings of this thesis, particularly the importance of mentoring and the recognition in very practical terms (as in, “the instructor opens up the planning of the course”) of the sovereignty and self-direction of the adult learner. Such recommendations can and should lead to a number of changes from current experience and practice in the seminary. Shea continues:

The fundamental nature of the relationship between instructor and student changes where, it is hoped, the students begin to place increased trust in the instructor. The environment of the classroom undergoes a change where risk is encouraged and rewarded, where students feel free to experiment with new methods and forms for preaching and encouraged to practice different styles of delivery. It becomes an environment where the instructor serves as one model of the preacher, where his

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<sup>96</sup> John Hind (Chair), *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church: The Structure and Funding of Ordination Training* (London: Ministry Division of the Archbishops Council, 2003), p. 16. IME stands for Initial Ministerial Education. CME stands for Continuing Ministerial Education.

<sup>97</sup> Shea, 'Self-Understanding in Catholic Preaching', pp. 211-212.

homilies and his delivery are scrutinized and critiqued by the students as part of their formation.<sup>98</sup>

Here there may be detected a clear move away from what has been called the banking approach to education, and the teacher as fount of knowledge and wisdom, and towards an appreciation of the learning environment that must be created. This was emphasised by Don Wardlaw, Professor of Preaching and Worship at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, in a book edited for the American Academy of Homiletics. He wrote:

If the goals in a preaching class are only to indoctrinate students with the history and theology of preaching, and to inculcate them with an understanding of the basic techniques for preparing and delivering sermons, then we need only lecture with a few practice labs thrown in to get the job done.<sup>99</sup>

Wardlaw and his fellow writers do not believe that preaching is best taught – or learnt – in that way, nor that what is taught that way will truly be preaching, nor indeed that such a strategy would be adequate for “readying any pastor to ‘preach in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching’ (2 Timothy 4:2).”<sup>100</sup> What he believes will provide the most fruitful conditions for the preacher’s development is a *learning climate* grounded in a Christian community whose lived values include trust and mutual support. As we come to consider the value of communities of practice and of learning that is enabled by working with peers, this will be an important ideal to bear in mind.

The collective effort of the writers in Wardlaw’s book was criticised by Thomas Long for focussing too much on the inner life of the preacher, and depending on or deriving too much from the “truth through personality” definition that considered earlier.<sup>101</sup> In Long and Tisdale’s book the writers stress that the teaching of preaching is best located in the practice of the Christian community, with the concern for the learner’s individual developmental needs downplayed. In my view the distance between Wardlaw’s writers and those in Long and Tisdale’s volume may not be as great as Long suggests, for in Wardlaw’s book the importance of environment and context to learning to preach is well presented. In any case the emphasis of the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>99</sup> Don M. Wardlaw and Fred Baumer, *Learning Preaching: Understanding and Participating in the Process* (Lincoln, IL: Lincoln Christian College and Seminary Press printed for the Academy of Homiletics, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching*, p. 11.

former on preaching as a social act, socially learned is very supportive of the main thrust of this thesis.

In recent conversation with officials from both institutions featuring in the empirical work of my research, The Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland, I learned that major revisions of their approaches to theological training were being carried out. Such was the state of flux that it was not feasible to examine closely the changes that were being proposed in time for this thesis. My impression is that old methods of training preachers have become unpopular or their effectiveness diluted by widely varying implementations, and their value has been questioned. Decreasing resources, an expanding range of roles expected of the minister, a growing sense of being time-poor as well as cash-poor, along with theological uncertainties about the value of preaching threaten to crowd out exploration into ways of training the church's preachers today. It is the purpose of this thesis to make a contribution to that much-needed exploration.

## ***Conclusion***

One may not agree with Plato's Socrates that virtue comes to the virtuous by the gift of God; still less that good preaching comes to the preacher solely by the gift of God. I began, as Socrates recommended, by enquiring into the nature of what is being learned. Knowing what is being expected of the preacher, and what the preacher believes that he or she is doing enables one to study how that activity might be learned. In this introduction I have considered different understandings and definitions of preaching and of the preacher. After this I reviewed some historical and present day views of what is required in the formation of a preacher. Finally I looked at homiletics and its tenuous place as a discipline in the academy. Though more highly developed and much more widely taught in the US than in the UK, homiletics both suffers and benefits from being outside the classic theological curriculum offered to ministers in formative training. At the end of this thesis I will seek to show how this insecure and occasionally ambivalent relationship with institutional training can be improved. In the next chapter I ask whether cognitive and behavioural – oriented learning theory can contribute to our understanding of learning to preach.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Cognitive Theories of Learning**

In this chapter I review cognitive and psychologically-oriented learning theory within the realm of adult education to establish a range of perspectives on the process of learning preaching. After an introduction outlining the difference between individual and social theories of learning, I question whether a strictly behavioural account will serve our purposes. I then delineate some of the many different approaches to cognitive styles and conceptions and taxonomies of learning and the ways they have supported attempts by educationalists to take into account individual learning styles. I conjecture briefly on how cognitive styles might map onto some traditional understandings of the requirements of preaching.

Theories of experiential learning underpin the action – reflection – theory cycle of learning, increasingly valued in theological education and training for ministry, and I look at some critiques and refinements. Finally I ask whether a consideration of adult learning theory can lead to useful and probing questions being asked of preaching training courses and schemes. Although the rest of the thesis is more concerned with social theories of learning, this chapter allows me to recognise that psychologically oriented theories of learning have their place in a complete description of the formation of preachers. It can be seen that there are many points of connection and there may be some limited relevance for institutional programmes committed to training preachers.

### **Individual and social theories of learning**

Educational psychologist Mark Tennant points out that psychological theories of education fall broadly into two camps, depending on whether they begin with the individual or with the social environment.<sup>1</sup> When they take the person as the starting point, the emphasis is on the internal make-up, the motivations and conceptions in that person. Theories can be behavioural, focussing on the observable actions considered as a set of responses to external factors. They may be phenomenological, based on data derived from the reported inner experiences of the learner subject. Finally they may be epistemological and derived from theoretical constructs of mental events and processes.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Tennant, *Psychology and Adult Learning*, 2nd edn (New York; London: Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

When the environment is the starting point or ground for understanding learning, the learner is viewed principally in relation to his or her social context, and learning is one aspect among many of the dynamic relationship between the person and society. ‘Society’ must here be taken to include the entire range of social and cultural resources that, ever in flux, nevertheless mediate the learning process. Strictly behavioural accounts can be based on either a “mechanistic relationship between the person and the social forces acting on it”<sup>2</sup> or on more dialectical approaches in which the person and the social environment act on each other.

This distinction to some extent influences the approach in the theoretical chapters of this thesis. In this chapter I will consider theories of learning which focus on the internal mechanisms and kinds of learning that take place in the individual mind (a nexus of reflective and non-reflective, conscious and unconscious conceptions, motivations, interpretative strategies, patterns of thinking and styles of appropriating knowledge and meaning). In the following two chapters I will focus on socially mediated aspects of learning. Of course neither approach is complete without the other, but it is important to recognise that a social perspective underpins the heart of this thesis, and allows consideration to be given to forms of development of preachers that are, I am proposing, neglected or poorly understood in our time. A review of psychological theories will however provide a necessary backdrop for this.

### **Why not a behavioural analysis?**

Behavioural theories have an emphasis on externally observable and experimentally controllable events. Based on a positivist epistemology, the language of behaviourism has traditionally been that of stimulus and response, reward and punishment, and in its early twentieth-century origins represented an aspiration towards supreme objectivity in scientific method.<sup>3</sup>

A behaviourist account of a preacher in action before a congregation might examine the physical setting, the voice, posture and gestures of the preacher, and the listeners’ observable responses. It might attempt to determine to what extent the preacher’s behaviour is reinforced by the feedback received, or whether the rhetoric of the speaker can be correlated with observable changes in the listeners. It will not concern itself with issues of a divine presence, acts of socio-cultural interpretation, ideology and power, implicit messages and semiotic feedback loops or in other

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 94ff.



words the meaning-creating and meaning-sharing activity that takes place in the kind of theological discourse that preaching represents. The fact that a behaviourist study could be conducted largely irrespective of the content and meanings of the communication act renders behaviourism somewhat theologically sterile for the purposes of this research.<sup>4</sup> Behaviourism led to the development of more sophisticated models for studying education and learning,<sup>5</sup> and certainly there may be value for teachers of preaching in one of its offshoots, competency-based education.<sup>6</sup> Adopting this approach would enable an arguably overdue move towards setting agreed standards of competency in preaching. Indeed, setting educational aims and objectives is now of course standard for curriculum development in higher education, and homiletics courses are conforming to this. Yet, for the reasons adduced above, one suspects that an exclusively behavioural assessment of preaching would encounter resistance from both students and trainers. The interior, personal element of preaching represented by the heartfelt message that the preacher is drawn, even compelled to communicate would lack recognition in a behavioural account. Also missing, by definition as well as owing to the impossibility of developing measuring instruments, would be the divine transaction taking place in the locus of the preacher's words, the listener's thoughts and feelings, and the action of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Cognitive styles***

Among the descriptions of how people learn, there have been attempts to analyse individual learning patterns and to discern discrete and objective (if not quantifiable) learning aptitudes. In some schools of thought these aptitudes or learning styles are seen as relating to cognitive styles, or the different ways individuals characteristically or habitually organise and process mental phenomena. Early psychological study from the 1880's onwards (according to the overview provided by Riding and Rayner) began to take note that some people have a predominantly

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<sup>4</sup> For an example see D. Greatbatch and T. Clark, 'Humour and Laughter in the Public Lectures of Management Gurus', *Human Relations*, 56 (2003). In order to evaluate the effectiveness of business speakers' rhetoric, they used "micro-analysis" of video material of audience facial responses to speakers' words and gestures.

<sup>5</sup> B.F. Skinner has developed his position on human learning in B. F. Skinner, *The Technology of Teaching* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968). This has led to a view of the role of the teacher as primarily that of a behaviour shaper. I will be considering examples of the teaching of preaching where this paradigm seems to be operating, but the evidence is they have been extremely rare in contemporary homiletical practice in the UK, as I reported in Stevenson and Wilkinson, *The Vox Project*.

<sup>6</sup> For an example, see Shirley Fletcher, *Competence-Based Assessment Techniques*, 2nd edn (London: Kogan Page, 1997).

verbal way of representing information in thought while others are more visual or imaginal [*sic*].<sup>7</sup> There have been numerous classifications of cognitive styles, and multi-dimensional instruments for measuring such styles, including Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Riding's own Cognitive Style Analysis (CSA)<sup>8</sup>, Witkin's field dependence-independence model<sup>9</sup>, the Allinson-Hayes Cognitive Style Index (CSI), the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI)<sup>10</sup>, and the Kolb and Fry Learning Style Inventory (LSI).

For the scholarly psychologist, many of these instruments do not adequately differentiate between cognitive **abilities** or levels (such as an IQ test might measure) and **styles** which indicate an individual's preferred mode of learning. Furthermore, 'styles' has been used to encompass a gamut of factors: environmental, emotional, sociological, physical as well as psychological – that contribute to the way individuals store, retrieve and process knowledge. Others tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are routinely employed to assess and characterise individuals with respect to many other aspects of personality and how they affect relationships at work and at home. For the homiletical educator, there are some promising avenues to be explored that are beyond the scope of one dissertation. One might ask how, for example, do “adapters” and “innovators” differ when as preachers they encounter extreme dissonance between time-honoured and institutionally enshrined dogma and the real and immediate pastoral problems such as suffering or gender orientation?

## Preaching and psychological type

Drawing on personality profiling based on the psychological type theories of Carl Jung, Leslie J. Francis, Professor of Religions and Education at the University of Warwick has developed the Francis Psychological Type Scale (FPTS).<sup>11</sup> He has

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<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Riding and Stephen G. Rayner, eds., *Cognitive Styles* (Stamford, CT.: Ablex Publishing Corp., 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Thus Riding and Rayner present four cognitive style constructs based on two dimensions, and these are uncovered by a computer-based test with three sets of questions. Analytic - Wholist is a dimension that refers to a preference for understanding by breaking a problem or issue down into parts or by relating it to an even larger picture. Verbaliser – Imager are polar opposites on another dimension that suggests an individual will be comfortable with either verbal expression or images and visual expression. Setting out linear gradations of these dimensions on two axes gives four base cognitive styles: analytic/verbaliser, analytic/imager, wholist/verbaliser, and wholist/imager. Plotting positions within each quadrant means that individual variations can also be accounted for, to a greater or lesser degree, (*ibid.*)

<sup>9</sup> H.A. Witkin, C.A. Moore et al., 'Field Dependent and Field Independent Cognitive Styles and Their Educational Implications', *Review of Educational Research*, 47 (1977).

<sup>10</sup> M. J. Kirton, *Adaptors and Innovators: Styles of Creativity and Problem Solving*, Rev. edn (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Explained and applied in Leslie J. Francis, *Faith and Psychology: Personality, Religion and the Individual* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005).

tested this with church ministers in a number of studies correlating psychological types and religious practice, preferences and tendencies. He has also gone on to develop the SIFT method of preaching<sup>12</sup> (from the words Sensing, Intuitive, Feeling and Thinking as they appear in the scales used for psychological profiling). This is a development of the relationship between biblical hermeneutics and psychological type theory he explored with P. Atkins in several books on lectionary preaching focusing on the gospels of Luke,<sup>13</sup> Matthew<sup>14</sup> and Mark.<sup>15</sup> In the SIFT method, preachers and readers of Scripture are invited to relate their psychological type to their reception and interpretation of the gospel narratives.

Leslie Francis has further developed these concepts and applied them to the hermeneutical task facing preachers in a book with Andrew Village, Senior Lecturer in Practical and Empirical Theology at the University of York St. John. By beginning to consider the meaning-making process of preaching with respect to culture and the listener, their work goes far beyond business oriented personality profiling and moves in a similar direction to this thesis. They recognise that "... sermons are the result of complex interactions between preachers, their world and their God. Preachers are part and parcel of the act of preaching."<sup>16</sup> They then show some of the ways in which each preacher can have natural preferences and different psychological orientations towards, for instance, quiet concentrated study of the biblical text as opposed to the clarification of their ideas through vigorous discussion with others or *vice versa*.

Further, they assert that recognition of personality type differences can refine and help the way preaching is taught.

Psychological insight into the differences between introverts and extraverts makes it clear that there may be no one right way in which to prepare for preaching... The difficulty, however, arises when introverted preachers try to teach extraverts to do things the introverted way, or vice versa.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leslie J. Francis, 'Psychological Type and Biblical Hermeneutics: SIFT Method of Preaching', *Rural Theology*, 1 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Leslie J. Francis and Peter Atkins, *Exploring Luke's Gospel: Personality Type and Scripture* (London: Mowbray, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Leslie J. Francis and Peter Atkins, *Exploring Matthew's Gospel: A Guide to the Gospel Readings in the Revised Common Lectionary* (London: Mowbray, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Leslie J. Francis and Peter Atkins, *Exploring Mark's Gospel: An Aid for Readers and Preachers Using Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary*, Rev. and expanded edn (London: Continuum, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Leslie J. Francis and Andrew Village, *Preaching with All Our Souls: A Study in Hermeneutics and Psychological Type* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

These are important insights into the way preachers operate. The work of Leslie Francis et al. is beginning to appear in the homiletics curriculum for ministerial training in the US and in the UK. More widespread recognition could help, for example, the relationship between ministry candidates and the supervisory ministers with whom they are placed to learn preaching.

## Multiple intelligences

Within the cognitive approaches to theories of learning is Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, first outlined in his 1982 work, *Frames of Mind*, and more recently strongly presented by Thomas Armstrong.<sup>18</sup> There are eight intelligences that Gardner eventually refined from his early work: Linguistic, Logical – Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily – Kinaesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal (understanding others), Intrapersonal (understanding oneself), and Naturalist.<sup>19</sup> Though later critics have suggested that 'talents' would be a better term, and have attempted to undercut the presumed objective reality of such behavioural complexes, Gardner did try to demonstrate that each has a different underlying cognitive process, and moreover can be associated with particular areas of the brain.<sup>20</sup>

Allowing provisionally for the validity of this theory, I would conjecture that preaching would seem to draw most particularly on the **linguistic intelligence**. This was described as the capacity to use words effectively, whether orally or in writing. Such intelligence is marked by semantic understanding of how words carry meaning, as well as structural understanding of syntax and grammar. These understandings are combined with or expressed through well-developed and demonstrably effective practical abilities in persuasive, rhetorical and educational explanation. Clearly a trainer in preaching might benefit from ways to assess and to improve this form of intelligence in developing preachers.

An examination of traditional Christian practice would also seem to indicate that in communication terms preaching will be enabled and considerably enhanced by a well developed **interpersonal** intelligence as well. The ability to understand others is a key component of preaching that brings and applies a message to the lives of the hearers. For instance, as Francis and Village point out:

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, 2nd edn (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Some of the material in this section I initially explored in a conference paper: Geoffrey Stevenson, *Conceptions of Learning in the Preacher's Progress*, Evangelical Homiletics Society Annual Conference, Vancouver, 16-18 October 2003.

The ability to contextualize sermons is an essential component to all preaching. Even where preaching is considered to be the text-driven proclamation of the gospel, the effectiveness of each particular delivery will depend on its relevance and timeliness for the listeners.<sup>21</sup>

Within the psychological type system used by Francis and Village, a preacher with such an intelligence might well be one who is more on the extravert end of the introvert – extravert scale and thus “may be better at reading the context than reading the text.”<sup>22</sup> I am not proposing correlations between the different systems of analysis, but attempting to illustrate that there are implications for preaching arising from an understanding of such psychologically oriented systems.

Tennant notes the value of some of these theories in de-coupling ability from differences.<sup>23</sup> Ability is often judgmentally valued from ‘best’ through ‘average’ down to ‘poor’, whereas differences may be couched in terms of strength - weakness. Even better are non-evaluative positions on polar scales representing different groups of the population. Instruments that are demonstrably sensitive to gender and ethnic differences would also be useful. However the central weakness that afflicts many of these theories of learning is the lack of empirical evidence to support them as experiential models, and this is another reason to treat them tangentially in this study. While connections, ranging from the fanciful to the obvious and commonsensical, can easily be made between these theories and the enterprise of preaching, it is less easy to apply them fruitfully to the practical challenge of learning preaching. The best hope may be for educators who are able through knowledge of such conceptual schemes to appreciate the diversity of student ‘intelligences.’ They will recognise that student preaching can exhibit, for example, a range of rhetorical skills deriving from these different strengths or abilities to shape and express meaning in the spoken word. Students in turn could be taught that their ultimate congregational listeners will also receive and respond to their preaching and their teaching in a range of ways.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Francis and Village, *Preaching with All Our Souls: A Study in Hermeneutics and Psychological Type*, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup> Tennant, *Psychology and Adult Learning*.

<sup>24</sup> Adapting preaching to listener differences is developed in Joseph R. Jeter and Ronald J. Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002). It might be said that this is one variant of calls for preaching to face the communicational and missional challenges of pluralist societies, and in that respect there is a growing body of technical homiletical work to stimulate and educate the preacher such as Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First-Century Listeners* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2001). See also Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

## Constructivist learning theories

In versions of cognitive constructivism<sup>25</sup> the learner seeks to build mental ‘structures’ that are primarily tied, most of the time, to a task facing them and that is ‘out there’ in the environment. Knowledge (or a schema to organise knowledge) is principally a subjective experience, one that can only be verified by the knower. In some epistemological forms of constructivism the link between mind and reality, or indeed the existence of a verifiable reality, becomes less important than the structuring process itself. The well known quotation by Swiss developmental psychologist and educator Jean Piaget’s (1896 – 1980) epitomises this: “The mind organises the world by organising itself.”<sup>26</sup> There is an existential scepticism derived from the extreme of this position but it need not detain us, for our concern is with theories of knowing, and their adequacy in informing the learning process. Constructivist theories of knowing do however inform theories of learning through experience, since the mind’s structures arise or are built through action in the world. Such a practical understanding of knowledge I will shortly explore in my section on Experiential Learning below.

## Conceptions of learning

Conceptions of learning attempt to discern patterns and modes of learning, identifying cognitive structures and their relationship to learner strategies. They are often theoretical, though some are based on phenomenographic approaches that collect data from learners’ self-reports and interviews and that carry out all research within the context of those actually learning.

For Marton, Dall’Alba and Beaty “a conception is a way of being aware of something.”<sup>27</sup> Learning may be, according to one very simple conceptual framework, accumulative or transformative. To **accumulate knowledge** is to ‘know a lot’ and may involve good memory skills in order that facts may be recalled. To be **transformed** in the way the self is viewed in relation to the world points to a different and more profound kind of learning. At first sight this framework is too limited to help us in our understanding of learning preaching. Säljö’s 1979 interview-

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<sup>25</sup> I will consider later the quite different variant, social constructivism.

<sup>26</sup> “L’intelligence organise le monde en s’organisant elle-meme.” Jean Piaget, *La Construction Du Réel Chez L’enfant* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1937), p. 311.

<sup>27</sup> F. Marton, G. Dall’Alba et al., ‘Conceptions of Learning’, *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19 (1993).

based study<sup>28</sup> was amplified by Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty to a more nuanced, progressive list of categories of conceptions of learning:

- A. **Increasing one's knowledge** – largely at the level of discrete facts that may be unrelated
- B. **Memorising and reproducing** – demonstration of recall of facts, concepts, and information when required
- C. **Applying** – knowledge (including skills, methods) is recalled and used appropriately
- D. **Understanding** – “making sense” of the knowledge, acquiring meaning through abstraction or relating knowledge to the world
- E. **Understanding something in a different way** – knowledge is re-interpreted to produce new comprehension and meaning
- F. **Changing as a person**

All of these would seem on face value to contribute to or form a part of the preacher's development, but it does not seem accurate to see them as hierarchical or necessarily building on one another. A rhetorical skill such as understanding how to find and use illustration, for example, is not based on an accumulation of memorised and applied knowledge. The concepts do not reflect the affective dynamic vital to many forms of preaching of being compelled by the divine presence perceived in the process. Nor does this progression manage to reflect the experience of living in and with a sermon, and of delivering it yet seeing it changing as it engages listeners who are involved in the communication act as partners “co-creating meaning” to use Quentin Schultze's expansive phrase.<sup>29</sup>

Notable systematic theories are Bloom's taxonomies of learning<sup>30</sup> and SOLO (Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes) as described by Biggs and Collis.<sup>31</sup> These have arisen largely out of a behavioural paradigm but are nevertheless useful when attempting to analyse and chart the progress of student conceptions of learning. Bloom's taxonomy split human learning achievement into three domains, cognitive,

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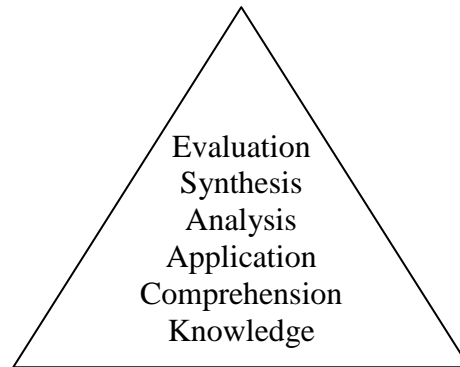
<sup>28</sup> R. Säljö, 'Learning in the Learner's Perspective: 1: Some Commonplace Misconceptions', *Reports from the Institute of Education*, 76 (1979).

<sup>29</sup> See Quentin J. Schultze, *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). He gives a theologically charged view of responsible communication as the Christian community might practice it.

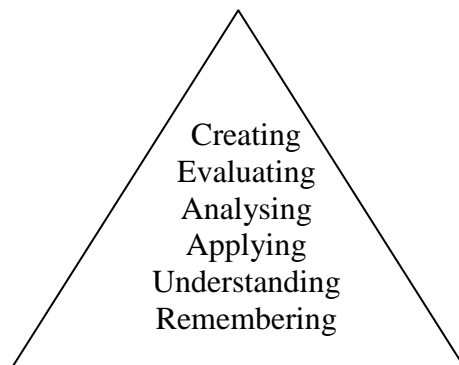
<sup>30</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*, 1st edn (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1956).

<sup>31</sup> John B. Biggs and Kevin F. Collis, *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: The Solo Taxonomy (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome)* (New York; London: Academic Press, 1982).

affective and psycho-motor, each with their own hierarchy of levels. In the cognitive domain, the part of the taxonomy that has been most widely used, these levels have often been expressed in a pyramid form, seeing each level building on the ones below:



This structure might begin to creak if we tried to use it to chart corresponding stages in a preacher's development, and is perhaps to be expected since Bloom's taxonomy in its earlier forms has been viewed and applied as a tool to interpret child learning at primary school level. A major adaptation of the taxonomy by Lorin Anderson, a former student of Bloom's, has had wider application in the educational field.<sup>32</sup> At first it looks like a minor revision with a few case changes, i.e. the nouns have become verbs.



The changes are rather significant however, with the top category of Ccreating replacing and upgrading Ssynthesis and allowing more explicitly for new forms of knowing. Creating is based on being able to evaluate, to judge or critique a position. Analysing and Applying are verb forms of Bloom's cognitive abilities in this schema. Understanding replaces Comprehension, to reflect better the ability to interpret and summarise when required. And Remembering labels more dynamically the process of knowledge accumulation, retention and recall.

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<sup>32</sup> Lorin W. Anderson, David R. Krathwohl et al., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Complete edn (New York; London: Longman, 2001).



This has the potential to begin to describe and to order phenomenologically at least part of the process of learning to preach. It may be that it applies most usefully to the development of rhetorical skills. I will seek in this study to note empirically where students are aware of learning progressions that map on to these categories, alongside the socially mediated modes of learning to be considered in the next chapter. It will be useful in the meantime to examine these modes of learning by considering them from a homiletical perspective.

## **A theoretical application of learning modes**

Is it possible to see how a good – or competent – preacher would operate in any or all of these modes? Recall for example Martin Luther’s nine virtues for the making of a preacher:

...to teach systematically ... a ready wit ... he should be eloquent ... a good voice ... a good memory ... know where to make an end ... sure of his doctrine ... engage body and blood, wealth and honour, in the word ... he should suffer himself to be mocked and jeered of every one.<sup>33</sup>

Of these nine, the following appear as candidates for intellectual development according to Anderson’s taxonomy: good memory, the ability to recall information and facts, is clearly essential to any public speaker, whether that Remembering is exercised in the pulpit during delivery or in the study during preparation.

Understanding can be seen in the requirement to be ‘sure of his doctrine’ while able to explain, summarise and paraphrase it, as well as in teaching systematically,

I think it would be forcing the connections to map Applying and Analyzing directly onto Luther’s list, and yet anyone with passing pastoral and preaching experience might suspect those abilities must be present if one is going to be able to teach systematically.

Similarly the exercise peters out looking for strict correspondence with Evaluating and Creating, although knowing where to make an end surely depends on evaluative skill, and it may be observed that a good sign of creative intelligence is a ‘ready wit’. Could another homiletician’s views fit with Anderson’s taxonomy of Creating – Evaluating – Analysing – Applying – Understanding - Remembering? Recall Horace Bushnell’s four talents noted previously: high scholarship, metaphysical and

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<sup>33</sup> Luther, Hazlitt et al., *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*.

theologic [*sic*] thinking style, style or a talent for expression, and talent or a manner of voice for speaking.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the first two may be examined in terms of the Anderson – Bloom taxonomy. Remembering (or recalling) information, along with the ability to understand (or interpret) and apply are foundational to what Bushnell seems to mean by scholarship, yet he expands it with this evocative description:

It (scholarship) needs to be universal; to be out in God's universe, that is, to see, and study, and know everything, books and men and the whole work of God from the stars downward; to have a sharp observation<sup>35</sup> ... so that, as the study goes on, the soul will be getting full of laws, images, analogies, and facts, and drawing out all subtlest threads of import to be its interpreters when the preaching work requires...<sup>36</sup>

He contrasts this with “book learning”: “As far as the preacher is concerned, this large, free kind of scholarship is the only kind that will do him much good” and he continues: “Books are not everything by a great deal. It is even one of the sad things about book-learning that it so easily becomes limitation upon souls, and a kind of dry rot in their vigor. The receptive facility absorbs the generative...”<sup>37</sup> Here he seems to recognise the danger of stopping short, perhaps, of the ‘creative’ in Anderson’s taxonomy. But it may still be doubted whether one can map Analysing and Evaluating onto Bushnell’s view of scholarship. Perhaps Analysing and Evaluating would together be the place for his other intellectual talent, a ‘metaphysical and theologic thinking style’. This is hard to pin down in Bushnell’s essay.<sup>38</sup> He states that it is not “cold, scientific thinking” or “anatomizing” thought, but that “the true thinking here is the original insight of premises or first things, not the building of cobhouse structures around them.” Nor is it a “formulizing” kind of thought (which seems to come low down in Anderson’s pyramid as well), although there is a place for it. He concludes in this part of his essay:

On the whole, the kind of thinking talent wanted for a great preacher is that which piercingly loves; that which looks into things and through them, plowing up pearls and ores, and now and then a diamond. It will not seem to go on metaphysically, or scientifically, but with a certain roundabout sense and vigor. And

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<sup>34</sup> Bushnell, 'Pulpit Talent (1866)'.

<sup>35</sup> There is much here to remind one of Gardner's Naturalist intelligence.

<sup>36</sup> Bushnell, 'Pulpit Talent (1866)', p. 86.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> And indeed some scepticism is warranted in the attempt to map our post-Freud, psychologically informed frames of reference onto nineteenth-century discourse.

people will be gathered to it because there is a gospel fire burning in it that warms them to a glow. This is power.<sup>39</sup>

From his lyrical language and from, for example, the appeal for thinking that has ‘vigor’ [*sic*] one has to conclude that for Bushnell it takes far more than cognitive development to make a preacher.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, little may be deduced from his account of the proper progress of a young preacher in gaining or developing these aspects of ‘pulpit talent’. As far as the taxonomies of learning are concerned, more research is needed. One may say tentatively at this stage that accomplished preachers seem to operate in all of these modes. I conclude however that they do not systematically map a progression towards preaching competence in a reliable way, unless one wishes to assert that all of the modes of learning must be mastered before competence in preaching becomes a reasonable aspiration. Neither do they demonstrate that achievement or operation on one level is strictly necessary for functioning on another higher level.

Re-aligning this discussion with the theological frameworks of this research, we also need to assert the element of divine agency. As Allan Demond wrote in his PhD thesis on teaching preaching:

Christian sermons presume the reality and presence of God and attempts to preach in the Christian tradition hold open the possibility that God might infuse the preacher with transcendent capacities. It is always possible that the preacher might come to “know” something about preaching that is simply given by God.<sup>41</sup>

The practice of preaching, at least under our definition and understanding of preaching as discussed in the previous chapter, seems to resist a systematic cognitivist analysis or mapping onto some taxonomies of learning.

## **Critique of learning styles**

More radically, and looking at practical implications for this work, one may conclude with James Atherton that “learning styles don’t matter.” Here he gently mocks the learning styles project:

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<sup>39</sup> Bushnell, ‘Pulpit Talent (1866)’, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> But could the ‘affective domain’ of Bloom’s taxonomy come into play here? His theory of the affective domain is less well known, and less well used. The five levels are: Receiving, Responding, Valuing, Organising and Conceptualising, and Characterising by Value or Value Concept, and are developed by David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom et al., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives 2: The Classification of Educational Goals; Handbook 2; Affective Domain* (London: Longman, 1965).

<sup>41</sup> Demond, ‘Teaching Preaching’, p. 44.

In this class there is a serialist pragmatist kinaesthetic learner (who is also field-dependent, not to mention his MBTI), primarily a convergent thinker, high on logico-mathematical intelligence but low on linguistic intelligence, sitting next to a holist, reflector, primarily visual and field-independent... who is also chronically shy (no-one mentions that). Even assuming that such things can be assessed with some validity and reliability, which is itself far from clear — what are you going to do about it? There are after all thirty other students in the class, each of whom could be described in similar terms. And two-thirds of them are female, and one-third male (two of whom are gay). Five of the class are from ethnic minorities, two are dyslexic, one is visually impaired, and three are clinically depressed (although only one of them knows it). Six are "mature" students — at least, they are chronologically over 25... Learning styles theory is an academic luxury: the students not only have rights but also responsibilities. You can't tune in to all of them, so they have to tune in to you.<sup>42</sup>

Atherton's scepticism is not without warrant, as the authors of a recent study on learning styles wrote:

Research into learning styles can be characterised as small scale, non-cumulative, uncritical and inward-looking. Our review provides detailed evidence of a proliferation of concepts, instruments and pedagogical strategies; for instance, we listed no less than 31 different dichotomies ... This proliferation is a clear symptom of the current conceptual confusion, the serious failure of accumulated theoretical coherence and the absence of well-grounded findings, tested through replication.<sup>43</sup>

The authors of this report conclude that sound, serious and extensive empirical research is required to identify and test valid theories "before any large-scale reforms of pedagogy on the basis of learning styles are contemplated."<sup>44</sup>

Another reason that "learning styles don't matter" is that, in practice, they cannot be allowed to matter. There is simply too much discrepancy between an ideal of matching teaching methods to learning styles and the demands of theological education and ministerial formation. Homiletics is enough of a Cinderella in the curriculum already without demanding several changes of costume for the Ball. Nevertheless there are important insights here for the preacher learning to preach. One is that for students, it can be helpful to consider their own learning style, and

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<sup>42</sup> J.S. Atherton, 'Heterodoxy: Learning Styles Don't Matter [on-Line] UK', (2002) <<http://www.doceo.co.uk/heterodoxy/styles.htm> > [Accessed 14/05/2006].

<sup>43</sup> Frank Coffield, David Moseley et al., *Should We Be Using Learning Styles? What Research Has to Say to Practice*, (London: Learning and Skills Research Centre, 2004), p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

liberating to recognise that learning approaches differ and that this can be a good thing. Secondly, the student preacher will eventually see herself or himself as a teacher in a significant respect. While the congregation is not a class, and education not the only goal of preaching, the preacher does well to realise that the congregation too is composed of people with valid differences. Individual listeners are receiving and processing the sermon in many individual ways, and an appreciation of learning styles can help develop the preacher's ability to construct sermons that will 'get through' to a greater range of listeners. To conclude, the homiletics class may not be much transformed by learning styles, but the teacher bears some of the responsibility to convey an understanding of learning styles to the student.

### **Conflict and cognitive dissonance**

*Contra* the emphasis on learning styles, Atherton is a reserved proponent of Cognitive Dissonance as a feature of effective learning. The classic statement of this is by Leon Festinger and is characterised as the mental discomfort occurring when students "find themselves doing things that don't fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold."<sup>45</sup> Keeping the client's (or student's) good will, and closely matching and accommodating to their learning style has undoubted value, Atherton admits, but if taken too far can deprive the student of situations where conflict enables significant learning. Just as muscles are developed through opposition, so a student preacher can make significant learning progress when struggling to find a way to help others to hear the word of God that has become so obvious and clear to her or him. Of course it would be seem retrogressive to deliberately neglect or deny a learner the conditions that are thought to improve their appropriation of material and skills in efficient ways. Nevertheless the challenging of preconceptions within a safe learning climate is being recommended by advocates of Cognitive Dissonance in teaching as a strategy that is effective for some students.

### ***Experiential learning***

Theories of experiential learning (and indeed the conduct of practical theology as a particular form of experiential learning) may well be traceable to Aristotle's concept of '*phronesis*'. This may be translated as 'practical wisdom' and is contrasted with his concepts of '*theoria*' (theory) and '*techne*' (technical reason). This *phronesis* is

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<sup>45</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Evanston, IL: Row Peterson, 1957).

or can be a product of educational processes that allow “action and ongoing reflection continually (to) interpenetrate” (*praxis*).<sup>46</sup>

Twentieth-century philosophical developments have expanded and reinforced this idea with a renewed interest in the practical nature of knowledge, as evident in these statements by Gadamer in his work on hermeneutics:

Application is neither a subsequent nor a merely occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning... Understanding here is always application.<sup>47</sup>

To some extent this undermines the typical Aristotelian attempt at classification and separation, for he is calling for a more holistic understanding of knowledge, practice and learning as interpenetrating each other in the student’s progress. In many ways this call has been addressed through the work of Professor Donald A. Schön (1930-1997). He wrote:

...the workaday life of the professional depends on tacit knowing-in-action.<sup>48</sup>

Describing the acquisition and application of such ‘tacit knowledge’ (in the phrase coined by the philosopher Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) and taken up Schön)<sup>49</sup> is also a feature of those attempting to identify and theorise about the kind of knowledge held and transmitted within social structures.<sup>50</sup> In Schön’s work the problem that is identified arises from approaches to education that try to preserve “the model of Technical Rationality.” This model or organising project is driven by philosophical Positivism. It works well for professions such as medicine and law with their “fixed and unambiguous ends, stable institutional contexts, and fixed contents of professional knowledge sufficient for rigorous practice.”<sup>51</sup> The model does not work for professions “such as divinity and social work”<sup>52</sup> where judgements are made and situations are assessed spontaneously and without conscious

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<sup>46</sup> James Fowler “The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology” in Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. van der Ven, *Practical Theology: International Perspectives* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 1999), pp. 78-79.

<sup>47</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, 2nd rev. edn (New York: Continuum, 1999), p. 309.

<sup>48</sup> Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1983), p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

<sup>50</sup> See Laurence Prusak, *Knowledge in Organizations* (Boston; Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1997). See also John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

application of a rule or principle. Often the professional cannot describe the process or identify the rule or rules after the fact, in the same way that people are unable to explain how they recognise a face, to use one of Schön's examples. According to Schön this is "the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge,"<sup>53</sup> to the extent that it is appropriate to re-describe most professional knowledge as knowing in action.

For the preacher, it is difficult but not impossible to conceive of a body of theological knowledge that might conform in the necessary epistemological respects to a model of technical rationality: historical systematics or biblical exegesis in some evangelical schools can exhibit many of the features of a technical rationality for its practitioners. But the idea is explicitly criticised by the authors of Wardlaw's *Learning to Preach* that "preaching is primarily some kind of codified objective data that has to be received, accepted and adapted to..."<sup>54</sup> In neither my research nor experience have I come across a UK preacher who proceeds through a process of developing and giving a sermon by following orderly steps as one might assemble a bicycle or prepare for a surgical operation. Methods such as this for preparing a sermon do exist and are taught in some US seminaries, but they are rarely if ever taught in this country.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore such homiletical method might be more creative and 'divergent' (as Schön uses Nathan Glazer's terminology) than 'convergent' than it first appears. Although there is a procedure to follow, at key points success and progress to the next stage depends on inspiration. Whether such inspiration is divine or human<sup>56</sup> the possibility of Technical Rationality as a primary mode of homiletical knowing is diminished on both practical and theoretical grounds.<sup>57</sup> Without retreating solely to the 'black boxes' of divine agency or tacit (indescribable) knowledge in preaching, our task is to consider the degree to which

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> Wardlaw and Baumer, *Learning Preaching: Understanding and Participating in the Process*, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> See ch. 7 as well as the Appendix "Steps from Text to Sermon" in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007). Dr. Sidney Greidanus is Professor of Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>56</sup> Or a combination, and this will depend on a theology of divine agency discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>57</sup> By contrast, see 'embodied knowing' as it figures in David J. Schlafer and Otis Carl Edwards Jr, 'Learning to Preach and How Short Conferences Can Help', *Homiletic*, 20 (1995). The development in Schön's work that also seems more appropriate to the way a preacher operates is his concept of reflection-in-action. This is described in Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, pp. 103-140. I am indebted, again, to Allan Demond for this insight and this citation (Demond, 'Teaching Preaching', p. 161). Equally valuable is Demond's critique of Schön's theory that warns us against 'either-or' when 'both-and' is a truer reflection of educational practice (Demond, 'Teaching Preaching', p. 182).

knowing-in-action informs preaching, and ultimately the ways students come by such practical knowledge through social learning.

Among the learning-as-process centred approaches, Honey and Mumford, in their 1982 (revised and updated in 1992) work,<sup>58</sup> describe a learning cycle for individuals based on the work of D.A. Kolb on experiential learning.<sup>59</sup>

Learning, they say, is best viewed as a continuous process that moves from having an experience, to reviewing the experience, to conceptualising from the experience, to planning the next steps. This moves like a spiral into the next cycle of experience, review, concluding, planning. In Kolb's model this cycle appears as Experience – Reflection – Abstract Conceptualisation – Experimentation. Each cycle feeds into the next, and the learner can enter at any stage of a cycle. One important insight is that no stage is fully effective on its own as a learning procedure.<sup>60</sup>

However there are dissenting voices that find such schema unnecessarily prescriptive and even futilely academic. Phil Race, a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy maintains that knowledge, if it is to be prized at all, is *always* a matter of doing, of experience, and of individual experimentation. Furthermore, he notes this insight is far from fresh. He quotes Sophocles:

“One must learn by doing the thing; though you think you know it,  
you have no certainty until you try.”<sup>61</sup>

Race has popularised among teachers in the United Kingdom his ‘Ripples Model’<sup>62</sup> in which he identifies five factors fundamental for learning: learning by doing;

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Honey and Alan Mumford, *The Manual of Learning Styles*, 3rd edn (Maidenhead: Peter Honey, 1992).

<sup>59</sup> See David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ; London: Prentice-Hall, 1984). Kolb in turn had been inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), author of groundbreaking theoretical work in the USA on adult learning.

<sup>60</sup> They have also postulated learning types based on how individuals respond differently to the different stages. These are: Activist, Reflector, Theorist and Pragmatist. They have formulated a learning styles questionnaire widely in circulation in educational theory literature, as well as on the internet, most obviously on Peter Honey's own website, <<http://www.peterhoney.com>> [Accessed 23/01/09]. Similar in many ways, and highly regarded by some Christian educators is the work of Marlene LeFever. She also draws on David Kolb. See Marlene D. LeFever, *Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1998). These theories of learning types are subject to the same criticisms as outlined above on pp. 51-53.

<sup>61</sup> Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 592. Or in R.C. Jebb's translation, “knowledge must come through action; thou canst have no test which is not fanciful, save by trial.” (Whitney Jennings Oates, Eugene O'Neill et al., *The Complete Greek Drama; All the Extant Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the Comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, in a Variety of Translations* (New York: Random house, 1938), p. 480.) Cf. Aristotle's “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.” (*Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 2, Ch. 1.)

<sup>62</sup> Phil Race, *Making Learning Happen: A Guide for Post-Compulsory Education* (London: Sage, 2005). See also his website for an explanation of how he has expanded his five ripples to seven, in



learning from feedback; wanting to learn; needing to learn; making sense or ‘digesting’. This pattern begins with want and need, proceeds through doing, is accompanied by understanding through reflection, and is cemented or grounded in the learner by feedback. He insists that this model is not a cycle to be imposed on learners, but a pattern of learning to be respected and accommodated by teachers.

Here is an experiential approach which on first reading is referring to the kinds of learning that a preacher experiences. As I consider the field studies, I will seek to identify situations where this pattern is evident, and how it is reinforced or undermined by institutional practice.

### ***Adult education and adult learning***

Before turning to social theories of learning that have already been implied or indicated by limitations in the cognitive theories, it is useful to recognise a variation of the cognitive – social dualism in the distinction which is sometimes drawn between adult education and adult learning. *Adult education* is usually taken to refer to planned or organised programmes or activities designed to facilitate the learning of adults. *Adult learning* may be defined as the measurable progress of the individual over time, and which progress derives from a range of experiences, input and stimuli, as well as from reflection carried out by and synthesis made by the learner.

Confusion can arise because the term andragogy is often used to encompass both of these understandings.<sup>63</sup>

The premises and understandings of the term ‘adult learning’ bring important dimensions to our study, and also reflect the dual perspectives outlined above. In 1978 Malcolm Knowles explained six core principles of adult learning.<sup>64</sup> The first recognises that adults tend to need to know why they need to learn in order to learn most effectively. Secondly, he highlights the learner's self-concept. In contrast to a

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order to include teaching/ explaining /coaching and assessing, which he calls “making informed judgements about one’s own learning.” These will appear in a new edition of his book due out in 2010. (Phil Race, ‘Ripples’ Model of Learning’, (2008) <<http://phil-race.co.uk/?p=438>> [Accessed 08/01/2009].)

<sup>63</sup> Andragogy as a term was coined in 1833 by the German educator Alexander Kapp, and has been popularised amongst educational theorists by Malcolm S. Knowles. His 1978 work *The Adult Learner* has been revised and re-issued in five editions; the last edition (1998) after his death co-edited by Elwood F. Holton III and Richard A. Swanson. For a wider view of andragogy, see Jost Reischmann, ‘Andragogy. History, Meaning, Context, Function’, (2004) <<http://www.andragogy.net>> [Accessed 10/05/2006]. It has been observed that a more preferable gender-neutral term would be *anthropogogy*. It might be added that difficulty in pronunciation of the both terms possibly inhibits their take-up and wide-spread usage.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III et al., *The Adult Learner*, 5th edn (Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998).

self-concept based on dependence, often fostered implicitly by the normalising teacher-student relationship, adults (ideally) maintain the concept of responsibility for their own decisions, and become self-directing in their own lives, and by extension their educational progress. The third principle concerns the role of the learners' experiences. An adult learner will bring a hugely influential set of experiences into relationship with the subject matter being taught, far beyond the capability of an educational director to anticipate or legislate. Fourthly there is the readiness to learn. The context of the adult's later stages of life means that pragmatic considerations dominate. Readiness to learn is associated with coping with real-life situations, as well as with development, i.e. moving from one life stage to the next. Similar but importantly different from the last, the next principle states the importance of the orientation to learning. Adults are "life-centred" rather than subject centred in their orientation to learning, and will be motivated by learning in the context of situations where there is a task to perform or a problem to be solved. The sixth principal demands consideration by the would-be educator of motivation. Adult motivation to learn is primarily internal, and often natural (that is, a complicit part of growing and developing). Adults are far less susceptible than children to externally derived motivations to learn, whether they are 'sticks' such as the threat of exclusion from future learning or 'carrots' of the order of awards and peer approval. Adults are thus typically able to draw on motivations that lead to "deep" rather than "surface" learning.<sup>65</sup>

These principles highlight in particular the *self-directed nature of adult learning*. Adults take responsibility for their learning in conscious and reflective ways not usually available to children. Our study of preaching, while taking account of the educationally interventionist aspects of homiletics as it is treated in seminaries, courses and training schemes, in literature and in the academy, will foreground and seek to recognise and explore the experience of the learner as an adult in becoming a preacher.

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<sup>65</sup> 'Intrinsic' motivations (as opposed to 'extrinsic' motivations such as fear or desire for reward) are reliably correlated with deep learning. See N. J. Entwistle, *Styles of Learning and Teaching: An Integrated Outline of Educational Psychology for Students, Teachers and Lecturers* (Chichester: Wiley, 1981). See also Paul Ramsden, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* (London: Routledge, 1992). While Higher Education is far from immune to the charge that it encourages surface learning strategies, (indeed preparation for professions such as law and medicine at times demands such learning), practical theology and preparation for ministry among older students would seem to involve almost entirely deeper learning strategies among students, with the possible exception of Greek vocabulary and similar subjects requiring sustained memorisation work.

The cognitive learning theories considered earlier in this chapter, because of their focus on the individual are sometimes criticised for failing to take account of the social or institutionally defined goals and objectives of education, but this as Knowles points out risks confusing learning and education. The enquiry into the nature of the learning of adults may – indeed they must – hold at a critical distance the goals and purposes of, for example, human resource developers or community health educators, and presumably the requirements and expectations of the theological seminary. Learning and education must be kept conceptually distinct, although in practice there may be considerable overlap of interest, theory, and implications for practice.<sup>66</sup>

According to Tennant, critics of andragogy as Knowles promoted and popularised it object to what they see as too much of a separation between the teacher and the learner.<sup>67</sup> For Knowles this may have arisen out of the desire to empower the learner and redress the balance of power traditionally located in the teacher and the institution s/he emblemises. This leads Tennant to the observation that “andragogy is not really a theory of adult learning at all, it is more a philosophical position on the aims of adult education and the relationship between the person and the society.”<sup>68</sup> In the same way, the difference between a child and an adult is seen in terms of the autonomy and greater rights that are accorded to the adult. The adult according to Knowles should not be treated as a child.<sup>69</sup> But then neither should children, as we shall see in a moment.

This usefully raises the question whether in fact children are so disadvantaged in terms of learning? In Matthew’s Gospel Christ turned the expectation of precedent and privilege on its head: “unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>70</sup> This may be seen as a profound, if not the most profound form of learning, if we are able to understand the Kingdom of Heaven

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<sup>66</sup> Knowles, III et al., *The Adult Learner*.

<sup>67</sup> Tennant, *Psychology and Adult Learning*, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> In the main the educational field of homiletics has not – until recently – been much disturbed by such political and philosophical winds, for discourse involving ‘oppression’, ‘liberation’, and ‘rights’ is alien to the community engaged in ministerial formation, at least with respect to its own inner workings and structures. The respect accorded by the preacher to the sermon listener, however, is an ethical issue taken up by Norrington, *To Preach or Not to Preach*, David J. Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon: A Guide to Preaching for Those Who Have to Listen* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1992), and Roger Van Harn, *Pew Rights: For People Who Listen to Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 18:3.

as at least partially available or accessible now.<sup>71</sup> If so, then a condition for that learning is an ability or disposition to share the innocence, the willingness to trust, and the ‘teachability’ or openness to new ideas and experiences of the child.

Further, the concerns about rights and power alluded to above are critiqued by this understanding of child-like receptiveness to learning. Donald A. Hagner comments on this verse:

Unless the disciples exhibit a childlike indifference to greatness by the world’s standards, they “cannot” (the double negative of the Greek emphasizes this) expect to “enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>72</sup>

A further biblical perspective on child and adult education can be gained in a study of the “discipline passage” in Hebrews 12: 5-13:<sup>73</sup>

My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
or lose heart when you are punished by him;  
for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves,  
and chastises every child whom he accepts.<sup>74</sup>

In the context, this is at first sight about explaining and enduring suffering, but other interpretations have been proposed. The issue turns on the translation of παιδεία *paideia*, and whether it is solely about discipline and punishment, as in Lane: “the positive role that disciplinary sufferings play in the moulding of Christian character.”<sup>75</sup> It is however possible to see with Werner Jaeger the Classical Grecian educational elements of training, instruction and forming good habits of behaviour.<sup>76</sup> Within the rhetoric of parenting the assertion is made that submitting to the loving *instruction* of God is the pathway to spiritual growth and moral formation.<sup>77</sup>

If there is a political agenda driving aspects of andragogy and seeking the ‘rights of the learner’ then in light of these biblical perspectives there may also be within this

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<sup>71</sup> C.H. Dodd (1884-1973) advanced a theory of ‘realised eschatology’ in C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 3rd edn (London: Nisbet, 1936), and later a ‘Christological version’ according to Clayton Sullivan, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Macon, GA: Mercer; Peeters, 1988), p. viii.

<sup>72</sup> Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), p. 517.

<sup>73</sup> Which in turn draws on Proverbs 3:11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Hebrews 12:5.

<sup>75</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), p. 420.

<sup>76</sup> Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>77</sup> Which, one might add, is truly to engage in a course of ‘life-long learning.’

agenda something of a rebellion against authority – an authority that has in the past claimed divine justification.<sup>78</sup>

The student of preaching cannot in good conscience permit herself or himself such a sweeping hermeneutic of suspicion towards authority - no matter how badly she or he is being treated by training college, course or teacher.<sup>79</sup> There will always be the potential for systemic violence against the individual within any institution, but to ‘rise up against the oppressor’ and struggle for the rights of the learner seems to carry with it an undercutting of the ‘childlikeness’ which we have discussed here. A stance of receptivity, of open-ness, of ‘teachability’, if it is indeed necessary to the formation of the mature Christian and as attested by countless authorities, will be equally necessary to the formation of the mature Christian preachers, if not more so. Such a stance, while it must not cause the student to accept blindly all that is being delivered in the name of the Lord by institutions exhibiting the fallen-ness of structural sin, is, I suggest, a *sine qua non* of formation.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed a wide range of learning theories that fall roughly into the cognitive or psychologically-oriented domains, while beginning to outline the kinds of abilities and personal development that contribute to preaching skill. For the most part these theories are insufficient to encompass or describe theoretically the multi-layered enterprise that is preaching, or else they are not sufficiently grounded in behavioural science to assist the educator seeking a sure basis for developing

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<sup>78</sup> Coming full circle, according to Knowles, the insights of andragogical theory have also affected the pedagogical model, i.e. teacher-directed education of children or child-like adults, leading to welcome changes in the education of children. In other words, child learners also deserve to be treated with respect. See Malcolm S. Knowles, *Andragogy in Action* (San Francisco; London: Jossey-Bass, 1984).

<sup>79</sup> Although there were in this research and in my recent employment as a teacher occasional intimations of such experiences, it was not the place of this research to investigate or give particular credence to any of these reports.

<sup>80</sup> By contrast, a number of Christian theologians advocate a wide ranging hermeneutic of suspicion towards the authorities and structures of society wherein are operating the ‘principalities and powers of this world.’ If preaching is to be part of God’s liberating agenda, then it must be “resistance preaching” enabling the re-imagination of the world the congregation inhabits. See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, 1st edn (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) and Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). Going further with semiotic insights into preaching language, John S. McClure asserts that “signing love” is the only way that the language of preaching may bring healing and liberation, in John S. McClure, ‘From Resistance to Jubilee: Prophetic Preaching and the Testimony of Love’, *Colloquium Journal*, 2 (2005).

curricula. “Learning styles don’t matter” is a rallying call for those sceptical of theories of learning that try too hard to assert the rights of the learner, however they can be of value if they allow the focus of education to be on learning and its processes, rather than on learner and his rights or on teacher and his course content.

The review has also thrown up factors such as conceptual struggle, disappointment and radical questioning in the learner preacher’s development, and asks whether there are constructive implications for the educator of preachers.

The role of practical experience aided by reflection, as common sense and received wisdom would testify, is clearly well supported by a theoretical base. The action-reflection cycle is embedded, or at least acknowledged in some programmes of ministerial formation in the United Kingdom. Whether this has found its way into homiletics is another question, and the empirical work will seek to shed light on this.

Finally, I considered how andragogy became emblematic of a move from teacher-centred to learner-centred education, and there are valuable insights into the ways adults learn that could improve the experience of being taught. As a campaign for the rights of adult learners andragogy has its limitations if it becomes neglectful of the essential ‘teachability’ common to young children. Tom Long argues that the concern for the learner in homiletics has been overdone, but I suggest this can be seen as a refinement of andragogy when he says that there has been a “movement in the field of homiletics ...from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach, and then to a learning-centred approach.”<sup>81</sup> A goal of creating optimum conditions for learning would avoid the worst excesses of drives to political correctness and of theories of learning styles that are unworkable in practice. In the next two chapters we will consider how a learning-centred approach may be developed through a consideration of social learning theories.

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<sup>81</sup> Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, p. 16.

## Chapter 3

### Imitation and Role Models

In the previous chapter I have argued for going beyond cognitive theories of learning to understand how preachers learn. Although such theories are useful for analysing the acquisition of many kinds of skill and knowledge, they fail to provide a fully adequate account of, as Tennant puts it, “the way in which our feelings, beliefs, attitudes and values are shaped by forces outside the domain of cognition.”<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I am reviewing homiletical and psychological literature for perspectives on imitation and modelling in the student preacher’s development. After a brief consideration of imitation and *mimesis* in human processes of communication and identity development, I consider aspects of imitative behaviour that might chart conceptions of learning for a preacher. These are imitation and skills acquisition, imitation and theological congruence and finally imitation and the character development of the preacher. These will then contribute to my learning theory matrix when I move to interpret the empirical data on real world preachers learning to preach.

The American Episcopal homiletician, David Schlafer, wrote about the ‘Ghosts and Graces of Your Preaching Parents’ in these words:

Anyone who has gone to church with any regularity has preaching ancestors – preachers who have modelled, for good or ill, what a sermon is supposed to sound like: how long, how loud, how laced with Scripture references, how esoteric, or how heart-rending it should be. Whenever you stand up to begin a sermon, there is a cloud of unseen witnesses behind you... They are present. And they are not silent.<sup>2</sup>

Imitation as an aspect of human learning can more easily be understood by considering the fundamental human drive to copy the behaviour of another. Social Learning Theory, as developed by the social psychologist Albert Bandura (b.1925) and others, incorporates cognitive aspects of learning, but attempts to place in the foreground an emphasis on the environment and social context of the learner, beginning with imitation and modelling on others. Bandura observes:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from

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<sup>1</sup> Tennant, *Psychology and Adult Learning*.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1995), p. 33.

observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.<sup>3</sup>

Many students of preaching seem to blunder or at least wander un-reflectively through their first few years of preaching, unaware of the influences and imprinting, unaware of the source of firmly held notions of what is right and wrong about a sermon. This can delay the discovery and adoption of their own ‘preaching voice’ and at worst can lead to inappropriate and frustrating attempts to minister in contexts that do not match the origins of their ‘preaching parents.’ As it appears in some of the empirical studies, self knowledge is not always easily gained. A consideration of the powerful social forces at work in human learning may provide the basis for a theory for learning preaching that helps students acknowledge and benefit from the influences in their past.

### **Imitation, copying and *mimesis***

There are two different activities that must be distinguished here. One is the inclination and ability to copy the behaviour or actions of another. This imitative drive is fundamental to many forms of learning, as Bandura indicates, and has its place in understanding the preacher’s development in several respects. I will return to this shortly. Before that I want to consider briefly another meaning of the word *mimesis* referring to a different although linked human proclivity. The term may be used to refer to the making of representations or likenesses of an object, process or event (whether externally observed or a feature of an internal mental landscape). Thus from Plato’s *Republic* through Erich Auerbach’s 1953 work on Western literature<sup>4</sup> to Paul Ricoeur’s concept of ‘triple mimesis’,<sup>5</sup> imitation or mimesis in aesthetics has traditionally been employed to refer to the representation of reality, usually artistic in intent, with an emphasis on the production of a text, a plastic creation or cultural artefact. A sculpture, carving or painting was (except in relatively recent art movements) a likeness, a type or a copy of what its creator had seen. A play or enacted ritual often re-creates a stylised version of reality. A poem or a piece of music typically seeks to evoke a response that is a copy, however personalised, of the artist’s response. This basic representational urge has led to definitions of

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

<sup>5</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. Blamey and J. Thompson, Vol. 1-3 (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988).



humankind as not only tool-maker, but symbol-maker.<sup>6</sup> Even a sermon, the preacher's conscious and deliberate creation, may be seen as a mimetic attempt to image or to portray a concept or understanding of divine or spiritual reality. Much biblical literature may also be viewed in this way, particularly the parables and sayings of Jesus ("To what shall I compare the Kingdom of Heaven?"), the epistles of Paul, and the extensive similes, metaphors and figures of speech found in the Psalms.

These two activities, the imitation of another person and the making of representations are considered by some to be linked at a fundamental level of human drives and consciousness.<sup>7</sup> For my analysis of learning preaching, I am going to concentrate on the more culturally overt forms of conscious and unconscious imitation, but the desire to represent reality symbolically is helpful to bear in mind.<sup>8</sup>

Fred Craddock, a pioneer of the 'New Homiletic' movement of the last 30 years in the United States, also noted the imitative and formative processes at work in the preacher's past:

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<sup>6</sup> Explications of metaphor in religious language are generally seen as starting with Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). See also Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). F.W. Dillistone's argument that symbols would lose their power in a technological culture is appealing as an explanation for the lack of communicative power in religious language, although it is not without its critics. See Frederick William Dillistone, *The Power of Symbols* (London: SCM, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Thus cultural anthropologist René Girard (b. 1923) explains Original Sin in terms of envy, *la mimésis d'appropriation* or "mimetic desire" arising from the primordial urge to imitate possessions, appearance and especially status. See René Girard, Jean-Michel Oughourlian et al., *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987). In my view the preacher should not be unaware of the mixed motives that underlie any aspiration to a vocation based on exalted or esteemed role models. Why is so-and-so's character and ministry so attractive that I want to be like him or her? What will really be happening in my preaching if I were to achieve that? These are questions a preacher might well explore with his or her analyst or spiritual director. The capacity for wreaking violence from the pulpit is too great, and the congregation too vulnerable, not to do this inner work.

<sup>8</sup> Some evolutionary psychologists have proposed the concept of the 'meme' to account for this fundamental urge to imitate and replicate. The term memetics was coined by Richard Dawkins and popularised through Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), and Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Gene as the Unit of Selection* (Oxford: W.H. Freeman, 1982). He attempts to describe and account for the replication and transmission of cultural forms and behaviours along the same lines of natural selection and variation seen in evolutionary theories. There is an intentional resonance with the science of genetics, and rather too much argument by analogy. However whereas the gene is a discrete material phenomenon subject to the most rigorous scientific investigation, memes are far 'fuzzier' and memetics seems to lack empirical studies and predictive power. For a view of the weaknesses of and objectors to memetic theory, see Dan Sperber, "An objection to the memetic approach to culture" in Robert Aunger and Daniel Clement Dennett, eds., *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 163-173. Also at <<http://www.dan.sperber.com/meme.htm>> [Accessed 10/05/2008].

...the one who learns cannot name all the ones who have been teachers because learning involves listening to many voices. One listens to the voice of emerging abilities, gifts of the God who calls one to preach. One listens to the voice of one's background in family, among friends, and with other significant persons along the way.<sup>9</sup>

This is a realistic perspective on the process of learning to preach, for it recognises the many conscious and unconscious ways by which we come to mastery of any skill or learned behaviour. It is a matter of paying attention to “emerging abilities” in an almost experimental way: we tend to keep what works, throw out what clearly does not work, and try again with what we think might improve with practice.

Significantly influential people, as in David Schlafer's observation about our preaching parents, are often too numerous to identify when we consider both the views that we come to adopt and the rhetorical ways that we learn when we wish to express those views.

### ***Imitation and the preacher's skills***

For Craddock it is axiomatic that hearing other communicators will contribute to an improvement in the keen student of communication.

It goes without saying that a person desirous of learning to preach will take advantage of opportunities to hear other communicators, especially good ones, regardless of their areas of interest and expertise.<sup>10</sup>

The great evangelical Methodist preacher William E. Sangster (1900-1960) also vividly expressed the desire of many students to learn by example:

What most students of the art of preaching want to know of one who has long practiced the craft is this: “How do you actually make a sermon? Let me stand at your elbow when you stand at your bench. I concede the importance of theory and I realise that only as I grasp it will I understand the reason why you do many things, but, nevertheless, let me watch you at work. How do you prepare to preach?”<sup>11</sup>

The mechanics of preaching is an area where learning through imitation, and where skills patterning may take place, in conscious and unconscious processes, as Sangster, Schlafer and Craddock seem to indicate. Although exegetical and hermeneutical skill in handling Scripture may be learned through some form of modelling, many of the mechanics of preaching learned through imitation fall

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<sup>9</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of the Sermon* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), p. 145.

broadly in the category of rhetoric. This is perhaps primarily because such mechanics may be observed from afar, while observing a preacher working with the text and developing a message requires a much closer vantage point. The mechanics of preaching range from vocal styles to eloquence and storytelling technique. Rhetoric may include logical or apologetic argument, analytical or critical treatment of material, discursive or didactic abilities, having a ‘flair’ for dramatic presentation or storytelling, or the facility to employ and present colourful and apt illustrations in the course of preaching.

Augustine, writing on ‘The Uses of Rhetoric,’ noted that imitation was of *prima facie* value to the student public speaker:

The fact is that, given a bright and eager disposition, eloquence will come more readily to those who read and listen to eloquent speakers than to those who pore over the rules of eloquence.<sup>12</sup>

Augustine wishes to teach rhetoric without appearing to commend or present a set of rigid principles. Since speaking well is almost never accompanied at the time of speaking by a consciousness of the rules of rhetoric, so he pretends to make little of Cicero and the rules from the “leading lights of Roman eloquence.” He does this even while in other sections he is clearly drawing on their practical wisdom.

So then, infants only become speakers by learning the speech and pronunciation of speakers, why cannot people become eloquent without any formal training in the art of public speaking, but simply by reading and hearing the speeches of the eloquent, and ... by imitating them?<sup>13</sup>

In this exhortation, imitation rather than following rules is key to learning. Thus:

There is the man who wishes to speak not only wisely but eloquently... him I much prefer to send off to read or listen to eloquent speakers and to practice imitating them, rather than instructing him to devote his time to teachers of the art of rhetoric, provided, that is, that those whom he reads or listens to are genuinely and reliably renowned for having spoken, or for speaking, wisely as well as eloquently.<sup>14</sup>

Augustine’s primary concern is to prove to his reader that rhetoric in preaching is not only a question of eloquence, but that it must be accompanied by wisdom (which he identifies with God’s truth). His conclusion is that those who cannot compose their

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<sup>12</sup> Augustine *On Christian Doctrine, Book IV* (Edmund Hill translation) in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. 277.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

own sermons should learn by heart and preach those of acknowledged masters. Such a technique is not unknown in British education of the last century, but there is little or no trace of it that remains in homiletics training in the UK and the US.<sup>15</sup> Of course the homiletics literature is not short of encouragement to learn from the sermons of great preachers. For instance E. Hale wrote in the *Harvard Theological Review* on recent books on preaching and preachers (recent, that is, in 1913):

Nearly every teacher of preaching advises students to inform themselves in regard to the lives and methods of great preachers. The advice is good if the student is not led into formal imitation, but reads to catch the spirit of the preacher.<sup>16</sup>

This is a clear affirmation of *some* kind of modelling, with a caveat. From an educational perspective, if it means the student must “catch the spirit of the preacher,” this may be irreducible, for how is spirit to be analysed and quantified?

There are of course dangers with copying and imitation when it is merely behavioural adoption. P.A. Beecher, writing on Homiletics in the 1910 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, warns of the tendency in a classical time of high oratory among preachers in seventeenth century France:

In this age Chrysostom was the great model for imitation; but it was Chrysostom the orator, not Chrysostom the homilist. It would be a mistake at the present day to imitate their style, which was influenced not a little by the unhealthy stimulus of the admiring court of Louis XIV. Their majestic style, with its grand exordium and its sublime peroration, became the fashion in the succeeding age; but it was a case of ordinary men trying to don the armour, and to handle the weapons, of giants, or of the unskillful rider venturing on the horses of Achilles. The result was that the imitators became proficient only in mannerisms and affectation, and dropped into sickly sentimentality and mechanical formalism.<sup>17</sup>

The metaphors of armour, weapons and horses in the hands of the unskilled are apt, if somewhat culturally specific. As in the phrase “catch the spirit,” language requires metaphor to express what it is in the best communication that is of the essence and

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, there is a widespread ethical feeling that preaching the sermon of another is a failure to fulfill the commission, or at the very least a sign of laziness. Sermons should be original creations of the preacher, and unacknowledged copying of material is tantamount to plagiarism. For a recent airing of the problem in North American churches see Scott M. Gibson, *Should We Use Someone Else's Sermon: Preaching in a Cut-and-Paste World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Hale, 'Recent Books on Preaching and Preachers', p. 362.

<sup>17</sup> P. A. Beecher, 'Homiletics (Online Version)', Robert Appleton Company, (1910) <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07443a.htm>> [Accessed 14/12/2005].

not contained in external mannerism. Giving a similar warning against unthinking imitation, Fred B. Craddock wrote:

Of course, listening to other preachers is very important, and far exceeds the value of the reading of their sermons. Since sermons are spoken, hearing is better than reading... However, let us keep in mind that learning does not mean imitating. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it produces caricatures in the pulpit. We learn from preachers poor, fair, good, and excellent, but not one of them is to be copied.<sup>18</sup>

David Jackman, director of the Proclamation Trust's Cornhill Training Course for preachers also stresses this: "In trying to teach people to preach, we want to develop their own natural talents and at all costs to *avoid cloning*"<sup>19</sup> (emphasis added).

### **African-American preachers**

One example of very significant instances of modelling or apprenticeship that achieve learning through close observation and copying appears in African-American traditions of preaching. Professor Henry Mitchell, a senior academic in homiletics in the USA noted that:

Black preachers are still formed to a great extent by those to whom they listen most attentively, often a parent or other significant person in the novice preacher's life. This is true even when the Black preacher seeks the refinements of a professional education.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the rest of Mitchell's chapter entitled "Training for black preachers through the years"<sup>21</sup> concentrates on the formal education that black American preachers were able to gain after the abolition of slavery. He surveys the educational background of about twenty famous black American preachers, and notes with approval the development of Black seminaries for training pastors with a registration in the 90's of around 700 – this in addition to all those African Americans enrolled in predominately White seminaries, numbering around 1,000.<sup>22</sup>

Despite all the historical facts he has gathered about the higher education of Black preachers, Mitchell appears to believe that other factors are considerably more important. Early in the chapter he states, "Black preachers have always served a kind

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<sup>18</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Stott, Green et al., *When God's Voice Is Heard: The Power of Preaching*, p. 190.

<sup>20</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-55.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

of apprenticeship, sometimes formal but more often informal under a known master of the craft of preaching.”<sup>23</sup> He does not expand a great deal on the concept of apprenticeship and learning at the elbow of a master, but at the end of the chapter, after mention of Gardner C. Taylor (b. 1918) whom he regards as the greatest preacher of his lifetime, he says:

The growth and development of preaching in the African American pulpit and in the churches and classrooms of America will proceed best when it is clear that the genius of a Gardner C. Taylor is only in part owing to an education. An education merely adds to the irreplaceable factors of sonship to a great preacher-father and native personal gifts chargeable only to God.<sup>24</sup>

It seems clear that he is using ‘sonship’ metaphorically here, in order to underline the close pedagogical relationship that can exist between an older preacher and a younger preacher learning from him. The importance of role models appears to a somewhat lesser extent in Richard Lischer’s account of the life and preaching of Martin Luther King Jr (1929 – 1968). Although he notes that King was mysteriously reticent about his own models and mentors, he nevertheless must have been deeply influenced.

The child of the African-American congregation grows up in an atmosphere of signals and effects that hums with the authority of the performed word. The fledgling preacher’s first teacher is, in fact, the atmosphere, which, according to one prominent preacher, the youngster absorbs by “osmosis”.<sup>25</sup>

Lischer goes on to trace some of the many ways in which the young Martin, as one of the many “eager young products of the predominantly oral culture of the old Negro church” practised and imitated and studied preaching in order to become truly accomplished at it. While there were instances of imitative learning, the picture painted by Lischer of King’s development in fact supports one of my theses that imitation is but one part of a larger web of learning situations or influences most properly described as social learning, which concept will be explored and developed in the chapter following this one.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 39.

In her homiletics book honouring Isaac Rufus Clark Sr (1925 – 1990), one of America’s finest African-American Episcopal preachers, Katie Cannon quotes Clark’s invitation to his own preaching course:

No dumb homiletical monkey can preach a holy sermon no kind of way. I don’t care how many benches you tipped over in your funkmaking days. If you ain’t sat under a person-in-the-know who can teach you about the deeper things of preaching under God, then you haven’t done anything but participate in a funkmaking show.<sup>26</sup>

Making allowances for the idiomatic language, and for the characteristic forcefulness of delivery, Clark’s appeal seems to be for a learner - teacher relationship that is personal and direct and immediate, whether or not that relationship is formed in a homiletics class or within the practices of ministry. One question I have asked of the data collected for the field studies is whether such direct and intentional instruction has been experienced or appreciated by the British preachers surveyed.

While my consideration here of the development of Black preachers is not meant to be an exhaustive survey, it is helpful to acknowledge here that another major factor in the development of black preachers is their own sense of vocation. This was borne out to me strongly in an interview I conducted some years ago with William Turner, Jr, Professor of Homiletics at Duke Divinity School, North Carolina.

People coming into my class, they have their preaching vocation before they come and in some cases they’ve had it for years, and they see themselves as preachers and know they’re going to go out and be preachers and if they pick up some pastoral skills along the way we’re lucky.<sup>27</sup>

Of course it must be admitted that there is the danger with such firmly held self-identification that there will be a resistance to the personal transformations that accompany the most profound forms of learning. By and large however the teacher of preaching must welcome such a deeply experienced sense of vocation as providing a motivation to learn that is perhaps without equal. My concern here of course is with imitation and modelling, but I will return to the issue of vocation and the issue of self-identity of the preacher in some of the empirical studies.

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<sup>26</sup> Katie G. Cannon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Interview of William C. Turner by the author, Duke Divinity School, 7th November 2002.

## Martyn Lloyd-Jones

In order to provide a brief ‘worked example’ of the influence of role models, I am now going to look at the noted Welsh preacher Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899 – 1991) who for many years occupied the pulpit of London’s Westminster Chapel. How did Lloyd-Jones learn to preach? Were there models and mentors who influenced or trained him? Accounts of his development as a preacher suggest that direct modelling and observation may not have been significant or traceable, but that influences of a more subtle kind may still be discerned. According to his biographer Iain H. Murray, his preaching was the result of the congruence of a medically trained mind with a passionate and compassionate spirituality and a vocation to communicate a biblically-grounded faith. Murray insists the models Lloyd-Jones followed were few, and that the preaching from his childhood was unexceptional:

One thing that was clearly recognisable about this preaching was that it was based upon no contemporary models. Most of the preaching which Dr. Lloyd-Jones had heard throughout his life had only convinced him what he must not do.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, there are clearly aspects of Lloyd-Jones’ approach to preaching which may be traced to earlier influences. Chief among these aspects are his ordered and rational approach and his appeal to reason. Lloyd-Jones shunned several of the common and traditional Welsh preaching styles of his time. Some were famously marked by ‘the hwyl’, described in the words of a newspaper of the time as ‘that combination of ecstatic emotion and musical intonation which held vast congregations absolutely spellbound with its mesmeric effect.’<sup>29</sup> Murray notes that Lloyd-Jones viewed this as an “artificial contrivance to secure effect” and would not employ it. He was similarly wary of anecdote and sentimental illustration which might please and entertain, but could overpower the listeners with emotion. By contrast, Lloyd-Jones’ sermons were “closely reasoned, with the main theme carefully analysed.”<sup>30</sup>

It is instructive to see how much of this formal approach can be traced to his professional life before he became a preacher. As a doctor training at St Bartholomew Hospital in London, he came under the influence of Thomas Horder, who was the consultant physician under whom he trained, serving as Horder’s Chief Clinical Assistant. Horder, though an avowed rationalist and “exponent of scientific

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<sup>28</sup> Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 146.

<sup>29</sup> J. Hugh Edwards in *The British Weekly*, quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.



humanism”<sup>31</sup> nevertheless made a deep impression on the young Lloyd-Jones, chiefly in the way he “thought and taught.” Murray quotes Lloyd-Jones:

The most astute and clear thinker that I ever knew was my old teacher, Lord Horder. This was the chief element in his outstanding success as a doctor. He was a thorough diagnostician and after he had collected his facts, he would reason until he reached his diagnosis. His method was to work always from first principles, never jumping to conclusions. Having gathered all the data on a patient he would then set up all possible explanations for his illness like a group of skittles. These he proceeded to ‘knock down’ one by one, as objections were applied to them, until there was only one left.<sup>32</sup>

Murray points out that Horder’s training of his students assumed that mastering ‘the elements of precise thinking and precise expression of thought’ was to accompany mastery of clinical medicine.<sup>33</sup>

One does not have to go far in an analysis of Lloyd-Jones’ sermons to detect a similar approach in the rhetorical strategies of his preaching. There are signs in the preaching of Lloyd-Jones and in his teaching about preaching that he expected listeners to follow the logic and submit to the power of his argument and his appeal to the mind.<sup>34</sup> Of course, this does not prove a direct influence of one mentor.

Lloyd-Jones’ form and method was also distinct from another approach common in Welsh preaching of the time, more expository and intellectual than that employing ‘the hwyl’. This expository method would take a biblical passage as its subject and then carefully and methodically analyse the text to reveal in point-by-point detail its meaning and eventually its application. The trouble with this, for Lloyd-Jones, was its lack of perceived relevance to the problems of the listener, especially the ‘man of the world who did not know what he (the preacher) was talking about.’<sup>35</sup> Lloyd-Jones’ sermon structure was therefore often inductive. He would start in his introduction with the condition of man (and the nature of the need, diagnosed with almost medical precision) and then proceed to the biblical text, explaining and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Murray records how Horder consistently urged on his students William Stanley Jevons’ *The Principles of Science: A Treatise on Logic and Scientific Method* and passed on his own carefully annotated copy, bought in 1893, to Lloyd-Jones. (Ibid.)

<sup>34</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), p. 271. This must be balanced of course with his understanding that revelation is perceived spiritually and inwardly and true conversion is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. (Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 277.)

<sup>35</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 147.

applying it. As he portrayed his rhetorical strategy, “I wanted to get to the listener, and *then* come to my exposition.”<sup>36</sup>

The clear adoption and development of such effective rhetorical strategies has been mentioned in the section in this chapter on Augustine and his appropriation of Ciceronian understanding of rhetoric. It may in fact be possible to trace the influences on Lloyd-Jones that he consciously or unconsciously imitated, but it is likely to be in his educational development at school, where public speaking was practised.

Despite Murray’s insistence that Lloyd-Jones followed few role models, there were clearly some. Tony Sargent, in his wide-ranging and carefully researched book on Lloyd-Jones, relates how as a young preacher in his first pastorate in Wales, Lloyd-Jones was impressed by some solid advice given to him by a very senior minister following a sermon.<sup>37</sup> Lloyd-Jones relates the incident in his book on preaching, commending the principle he learnt to his students of preaching:

...the old preacher, who was exactly sixty years older than I was, very kindly and with a desire to help and encourage me gave me a very serious warning. ‘The great defect of that sermon this afternoon was this’, he said, ‘that you were overtaxing your people, you were giving them too much... you are only stunning them and not helping them.’ And then he said. ‘You watch what I shall be doing tonight. I shall really be saying one thing, but I shall say it in three different ways.’<sup>38</sup>

This is a good example of instruction and modelling working together, and Lloyd-Jones clearly approves of the direct and incisive speech, the gracious attitude, and the way in which his mentor demonstrated what he was instructing. Going back to Murray’s biography, in telling the story of Lloyd-Jones’ early years he picks out some influences on the young doctor, but also wishes to present his subject as an especially favoured and blessed, not to say anointed preacher, whose ministry is not reducible to the sum of his role models. Of course the influences on any communicator or teacher are many and are often lost in the personal past. However we should perhaps be wary of the biographer or hagiography which presents their subject as *sui generis* in their place in history. Imitation, conscious or unconscious, runs too deeply in humankind for that.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: An Enquiry into the Convictions of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Unction as the Paramount Need in the Preaching Ministry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 257.

## ***Imitation and the preacher's theology***

Secondly I want to consider briefly how or whether preachers imitate or reflect the theology of their models and mentors. Learning to preach involves learning what to preach. The theological beliefs of the preacher are most properly the basis for her preaching but they are occasionally difficult to separate from the character and personality of the preacher. Recent writings on how to preach, from Spurgeon and Sangster to Lloyd-Jones and Stott, are all at pains to keep the 'what' and the 'who' together with the 'how'. So Lloyd-Jones wrote on the make-up of a preacher:

What matters? The chief thing is the love of God, the love of souls, a knowledge of the Truth, and the Holy Spirit within you. These are the things that make the preacher. If he has the love of God in his heart, and if he has a love for God; if he has a love for the souls of men, and a concern about them; if he knows the truth of the Scriptures; and has the Spirit of God within him, that man will preach.<sup>39</sup>

For Lloyd-Jones the mechanics, such as eloquence, and intensive study of bible, doctrine and history, are secondary to the existence in the preacher of a lived theology. How the preacher comes to 'live' his or her theology is partly a matter of their devotional life, how they pray, and how they respond to the liturgy and sacraments of the church, and this is also as I will shortly consider a question of character shaped by God's grace. But it would also seem to be a matter of how they have been instructed in the faith by preachers and teachers to whom they have listened.

For preachers in training an aspect of this was explored by P.A. Bence in an unpublished doctoral dissertation. In a wide-ranging and well analysed empirical study, Bence identified a range of particular ways in which the teaching of preaching was influenced by the theology of the teacher:

Institutional and denominational setting does affect the teaching of preaching, but, as hypothesized, not to the degree theology does. The manner in which a lecturer's theology determines his teaching is most noticeable in relation to three questions relating to teaching content: (1) From what source(s) should preachers seek preaching content? (2) On what basis should preachers select content from their source(s)? (3) Once the content has been determined, by what criteria should preachers prepare material for delivery?<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>40</sup> P.A. Bence, 'An Analysis of the Effect of Contrasting Theologies of Preaching on the Teaching of Preaching in British Institutions of Higher Learning' (Dissertation, St Andrews, 1989).

Bence shows that the answers to these three questions which he considers central to the educational input for a preacher can be to a demonstrable extent correlated with the kind of theology held by the lecturer. What Bence's study lacks, for my purposes, is empirical evidence that either the student learning experience, or the theology that the student subsequently expresses through their own preaching, correlate with the theology of the lecturer. It is by no means axiomatic nor inevitable in practice that this should happen. It will be seen in the interviews with the Methodist preachers that some of them are cheerfully willing, given sufficient time and distance, to depart theologically from their significant mentors and role models.

It should also be remembered that a strictly imitative effect may be difficult to separate from the theological content that is taught and received by mentors and teachers of preaching. If it is not evident that preachers programmatically imitate the preached theology of earlier role models, perhaps their imitation operates in the more subtle area of character formation and development.

### ***Imitation and the preacher's character***

As I discussed in chapter 1, the formation of the preacher is traditionally as much about character as about skills, and in the next section I will look at imitation, modelling and patterning chiefly with respect to the areas of character growth and the development of personal qualities, such as holiness, wisdom, faithfulness, integrity, and charity. These are of course the kinds of character or personality traits most usually associated with the preacher, pastor and saint. It is also possible that a young preacher might admire and aspire towards a role model's erudition, literacy or way with words, perception or insightfulness, forcefulness or charm, and so on. For centuries the church has recognised that the Word is made flesh anew when a preacher's personal integrity and holiness validate and in-spire<sup>41</sup> the message she or he brings. While recognising the sovereignty of divine grace in the life of the preacher, this study leads us to ask at this point how and to what extent are those qualities developed through imitation or modelling?

### **Identification of medium and message**

An important implication for preachers is that the kerygmatic content of preaching with its radical demands presented to the community by the Christian preachers may be delivered just as effectively – if not more effectively – in their persons, as in their words. The British-born Baptist homiletics professor Michael Quicke writes about

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<sup>41</sup> In the sense of God-breathed, see 2 Tim 3.16.

the incarnational nature of preaching: “Preaching is not telling people good news. It is good news.”<sup>42</sup> The life-changing event of Christ-with-us is not merely the content of some act of communication called preaching, and that can be heard in the message, but it is (also) in the person who is delivering that message. Quicke says that the Good News of Jesus Christ is Jesus proclaiming himself and living out his own story, and he cites Pierre Babin in conversation with Marshall McLuhan who calls Jesus “the only case in which the medium and the message are perfectly identical.”<sup>43</sup>

It is not merely that the lifestyle of the preacher authenticates the message, nor that their integrity underpins the congregational belief in the validity of what is being said.<sup>44</sup> Something more is happening. The preacher incarnates and makes visible the message. But how does this occur? Apart from a sovereign act of God in the ‘sermon event’, the other requirement, stated in the extreme, is that the preacher should be “holy, for I am holy.”<sup>45</sup>

### **The preacher’s holiness**

As I noted in my Introduction, the call for the preacher’s holiness as a way in for the action of God in the sermon is urged in many instructional texts for preaching. Thus English Puritan Richard Baxter (1615 – 1691) wrote in *The Reformed Pastor*:

He is likely to be but a heartless preacher who has not the Christ and grace that he preaches in his heart.<sup>46</sup>

The great nineteenth century Scottish preacher Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843) said, “My people’s greatest need is my personal holiness.”<sup>47</sup> Listeners to McCheyne testified that there was something about his appearance and presence in

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<sup>42</sup> Michael J. Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Carlisle, Cumbria UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. This phrase invokes Marshall McLuhan’s often quoted, often misunderstood concept ‘The medium is the message.’ In his studies of human communication in the 1960’s he proposed that the mass media are significant agents for change in society and culture but that as such they act as extensions of ourselves. Readers familiar with McLuhan are also invited to consider the degree to which preaching lives up to its potential as a ‘hot’ or high-definition medium, in McLuhan’s terminology, with the potential of significant and highly engaged involvement of the listener. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

<sup>44</sup> The *ethos* of the speaker according to some classical rhetoricians (such as Isocrates though not Aristotle) may be established by the moral character and/or by the listeners’ perceptions of the speaker. See Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Logos and Power in Isocrates and Aristotle* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> 1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 11:44ff.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Alexander Bonar and Robert Murray McCheyne, *The Life of Robert Murray McCheyne* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960).

the pulpit that marked the messenger as well as the message as coming from God. Lloyd-Jones remarked that for some of his hearers McCheyne “was already preaching before he opened his mouth.”<sup>48</sup>

The Methodist evangelical preacher W. E. Sangster (1900-1960) employed the term ‘unction’ to refer to divine agency in preaching, which was “a thing apart from good sermon outlines, helpful spiritual insights, wise understanding or eloquent speech.” He maintained that “holiness is the secret of unction.”<sup>49</sup> This necessary, if not sufficient condition for the presence of God is what the Scottish professor James S. Stewart (1896-1990) called in his Warrack Lectures on preaching “the quality of life and the total witness of character which by the grace of God a man may bring to it (his vocation).”<sup>50</sup> Urging close attention to the preacher’s inner life, Stewart went on:

You must believe intensely and with total conviction, if you are to persuade others to believe. Your own spirit must be subjected to the full force and challenge of Christ’s ethic, must be energized, supernaturalized, if you are to bring God’s help to bear upon the gaping needs of men.<sup>51</sup>

Stewart does not attempt to explain why this must be so, except to remind the reader that words are either “reinforced or mercilessly negated”<sup>52</sup> by the quality of life behind them. His direction for the students at New College and St Mary’s College was that the inner life is built and protected by being utterly dedicated to the work, by being constant in prayer, by cultivating humility of heart, by having authority arising from inner conviction and the truth of the gospel message, and by being “on fire for Christ” and possessed of an overpowering sense of the urgency of the task and purpose of preaching. How are these qualities to be gained? Stewart’s educational method, in delivering the Warrack Lectures, for instance, implies that he hopes his words will inspire and instruct, whether they are heard or read.

But how might the widely acknowledged, indeed crucial matter of the preacher’s character and holiness be related to learning through imitation?

If the imitative drive is as strong as has been suggested, it is no surprise to hear Paul commending imitation to the recipients of his letters.<sup>53</sup> Will not the listener – particularly a would-be preacher – to sermons based on Paul’s exhortatory example,

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<sup>48</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> W. E. Sangster, *Power in Preaching* (London: Epworth, 1958), p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> Stewart, *Heralds of God*, p. 190.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>53</sup> See for example 1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1 and 2 Thess 3:7.

who accepts or finds resonance with the message or *logos* of the speaker, who desires such named and exhorted Christian traits including holiness above all, will she or he not consciously or unconsciously attempt to ‘imitate the desires’ of the preacher, to become like them, to aspire to the *ethos* that is before them? That is a pattern that may be characteristic of preachers occupying a position of authority and importance, where the priest is addressed as Father or where the pastor is a leader of the church community. It may be less affecting for the learner preacher growing up with more egalitarian views of preaching, where the preacher is considered to be more on the same level as the listener.<sup>54</sup>

Of course underlying this is the exhortation, often explicit as well as pervasively implicit in the teaching and preaching of the faith, to become more Christ-like, and again most preachers are adopting Paul’s rhetorical model:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself...<sup>55</sup>

“Model yourself after me,” a preacher seems to be saying implicitly from the pulpit. Explicitly and with due humility they might add, “Only in so far as, by the wondrous grace of God, I reflect a small fraction of the moral perfection that is Christ.” I suggest this will be further enhanced if learner preachers aspire to the same vocation to preach as the most effective or powerful speakers that they hear.

Preachers would appear to draw their authority as role models from the spiritual tradition of *imitatio Christi*.<sup>56</sup> This is not to open a Donatist debate about whether the person and morals of the preacher impinge upon the efficacy of the sermon. Nor, since my concern is with the inspiration given by living models, will I continue to look at conscious patterning after the life and person of Christ.<sup>57</sup> It is to recognise

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<sup>54</sup> ‘On the same level’ in terms of authority and status, but also perhaps physically, when high pulpits are abandoned in favour of preaching from chancel steps.

<sup>55</sup> Philippians 2:5-6.

<sup>56</sup> Such traditions of devotional practice are commonly associated with the mystical work attributed to Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ: The First English Translation of the 'Imitatio Christi'*, trans. B.J.H. Biggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). They clearly derive from Paul’s desire “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death...” (Philippians 3:10).

<sup>57</sup> Recalling my initial discussion of the drive to imitate and to make representations, I want to refer again to the ‘mimetic theory’ of René Girard, cf. footnote no. 7 of this chapter on p. 59. According to Girard it is inalienably a part of our social natures to imitate or appropriate for ourselves at the deepest psychological levels the desires of others with whom we live. The scarcity of any resource (be it food, land, or the monogamous sexual love of another), leads inexorably to “violence-producing communities.” In Girard’s mimetic theory, the imitative desire that leads inevitably to violence has been redeemed through the person and work of Jesus. A “childlike imitation of Christ” is presented by

that nearly all theologies of preaching assert that there is an element of transparency or disclosure in the preaching act. The personal qualities and the integrity of the preacher are significantly on show for all to see. The reception of the message is unavoidably and irrevocably influenced by the messenger, as I have noted. Throughout the enterprise there runs a principle of what might be called the supernatural transference of spiritual qualities from one Christian to another. Richard Baxter, again from *The Reformed Pastor* wrote:

When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold; and when it is confused my preaching is so too: and I can observe the same frequently in the best of my hearers, that, when I have a while grown cold in preaching, they have cooled accordingly ... Whereas if we abound in faith, love and zeal, how it will overflow to the refreshing of our congregations, and how it will appear in the increase of the same graces in others.<sup>58</sup>

This gives perhaps the best insight into the mysterious workings of imitation, and how one preacher might, as it were, set another preacher on fire. Could it be that where there is already what I have called a theological congruence, the effect of the role model on the student will be to stir in them the best qualities of virtue and spiritual fervour so that their own preaching will begin to exhibit the same?

### **The uniqueness of the preacher**

It would seem I have moved well away from simple imitation, or even the setting up of a role model. In the development of a preacher, imitation and modelling are enhanced by an essential and divinely directed setting-apart of the self of the preacher. The preacher, if the foregoing emphasis on authenticity and embodied preaching are accepted, must recognise and accept their uniqueness in the pulpit. Each effective and authentic preacher must find and learn to employ his or her own voice.<sup>59</sup> The writers for the Academy of Homiletics publication *Learning Preaching* (1989) quote Paul Scherer in his 1943 *Yale Lectures on Preaching*:

To be only yourself six days in the week and on the seventh to be no other whether in reading the service or in preaching the sermon may not be very thrilling; but it is the only hope there is for you. Never belittle that self or despise it; never disown or

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Girard as the only kind of escape from cycles of violence, warfare, and persistent scapegoating. See Girard, Oughourlian et al., *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. 74.

<sup>59</sup> David Schlafer notes that finding and shaping a preaching voice can be more difficult for those *without* appropriate models, or whose preaching parents are especially different. This is particularly and problematically true for women learning to preach who have grown up as Christians listening only to male preachers, Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word*, p. 34. This will be seen in several of the women contributors to the field studies.



betray it. You have nothing else but you. Give it reverence and give it freedom. To cut through all artificialities of being, to put off all the pompous habits of a false dignity ... and to let that essential you, redeemed and enabled in the love and fellowship of Jesus Christ, do its proper work in the world – that is to turn loose something God has never tried before; and He will never try it again: make what you please of that!<sup>60</sup>

Here is a challenge, if any were needed, to those who would slavishly, if dutifully, copy their models and mentors in preaching. Of course there are skills to be learnt, techniques to be mastered through observation and practice, along with the development of biblical mastery and theological maturity. Much more is called for however: a depth of personal participation and involvement in the act of preaching, an ability to draw on the rich complexity of the preacher's own human personality, and an honesty about living the life of faith in the same kind of world as the listeners. These need to be made manifest in the pulpit if the preacher's true voice is to be heard.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to show that imitation plays a significant role in learning to preach. The testimonies to such effect are numerous, as will be seen in the field studies. Explicit effects of individual role models on a preacher are difficult to trace with precision. I suggested three areas of a preacher's development where imitation might come into play. Firstly, learning from observing the skills and techniques of another is vital for the development of many. In Black preaching this is often recognised in a pattern of apprenticeship or deep "father-son" relationships. Others, such as Martin Lloyd-Jones, may adopt and adapt the skill set of a role model less self-consciously but no less pervasively.

Secondly, while the theological position of a role model is inextricably linked to their preaching as it is being modelled for a student, and to how they teach preaching, it can be difficult to identify with empirical certainty how the imitative process *per se* may be significant for the student learning experience. A third area of imitative patterning, affecting the character development and spirituality of the preacher, is in many ways the most fruitful from a theological if not pedagogical perspective. The strong urging in Christian education to imitate and aspire towards the Christ-like character of the role model itself derives from the tradition of *imitatio Christi*. Yet again the precise influence of role models in this respect is difficult to trace

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<sup>60</sup> Wardlaw and Baumer, *Learning Preaching: Understanding and Participating in the Process*, p. 48.

sociologically or psychologically. At the same time, an attempt to erase or deny all the particularities of individual personality risks losing something equally vital to the preacher, the sense the listener receives that the preacher is connected to and knowledgeable about their own humanity. This last realisation points to a particular and important theoretical limitation in the desirability of the influence of role models in preaching.

The field studies contain many examples of positive and negative effects that may nuance this discussion of imitation. Yet young or would-be preachers and their role models past and present are not operating in a closed system, where causes and effects are discrete and identifiable. Such is the wide range of influences on student *and* role model that a fuller explanation is necessary. In order to examine the contexts in which both student and role model are operating it will be helpful to consider further social theories of learning. In the next chapter I will examine the idea of situated learning, and the concept of communities of practice.

## Chapter 4

# Communities of Practice

A discussion of homiletics education would be incomplete without consideration also of communities of practice.<sup>1</sup>

My consideration of imitation and its role in the preacher's development is a reminder, if one were needed, that the view of the preacher as something of an auto-didact with a divine calling can miss important elements that are vital for a full exploration, and as we shall see, important for institutional provision for the development of ministers. I am arguing that social learning theories go beyond the recognition of the importance of role models to a description of a whole nexus or web of relationships that are significantly formative in the learner's development. In this chapter I will examine the concept of communities of practice as initially suggested by educational theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger<sup>2</sup> and developed by Wenger in later works.<sup>3</sup> I will be asking in what ways this concept can describe and illuminate the process of learning to preach. I will discuss limitations of the theory, and consider how the concept, when expanded and mapped onto preachers' learning trajectories, suggests ways that the development of preachers could be enhanced with this improved understanding of what preachers and their listeners are doing as together they learn to make sermons.

In part 2 of this chapter I will consider aspects of mentoring and coaching that straddle the different worlds of interventionist education (for example, the 'banking' approach) and situated learning (drawing on shared knowledge). I conclude by examining the idea of peer-assisted learning to determine how much of learning from colleagues and from learners of equal status might be expected in a study of learning preaching.

None of this emphasis on situated learning is to deny that the teacher or pedagogue is a primary factor or agent in many 'learning environments,' giving direct or indirect instruction which the student attempts to master and assimilate (in the case of ideas, theories and concepts), to memorise (facts or knowledge), or to interpret in action

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Heille, "Finding Support from School, Denomination and Academy," in Thomas G. Long, Fred B. Craddock et al., *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*.

<sup>3</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Etienne Wenger and Richard A. McDermott, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

(practical skills or know-how). But equally there are fundamental factors and agents that may be identified through their relationship with the learner and which taken together constitute a social environment for learning. Theories of situated learning that go beyond the commonplace notion of learning through doing attempt more specifically to provide the basis for analysing learning in ways that identify the effects of the environment and context on the learning process. The theories often suggest further that in some aspects these influences are in a reciprocal relationship – that is, the learner has effects on the learning environment. Again, these paradigms challenge the cognitive pedagogical models outlined in chapter 2, chiefly in the assertion that cognitive models often do not adequately recognise the adult learner's active role in the learning process, the subliminal but highly important effects of the learning environment, and the place of imitation and role models, as I discussed in chapter 3.

### ***Part 1: Social participation as learning***

The background to Wenger's theories about communities of practice is his work with Jean Lave in 1991 when they asked what it was about apprenticeship in a range of professions that was so significant to the learning process.<sup>4</sup> They considered studies carried out by several social anthropologists into the learning processes that operated in five apprentice-like situations: Yucatec Mayan midwives in Mexico, U.S. Navy quartermasters, tailors in Liberia, butchers in US supermarkets, and 'non-drinking alcoholics' in Alcoholics Anonymous.<sup>5</sup> They observed that apprenticeship as usually understood (that is, a master-novice relationship where craft instruction and wisdom are imparted over time) did not fully account for the ways in which novices learned. In an earlier article, Lave indicated that a simple concept of apprenticeship, i.e. acquiring a skill set through observation of a master and supervised practice, required something more in order to account for the learning process:

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<sup>4</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*.

<sup>5</sup> It may appear that the connections are few between preaching and say, butchering meat or working in a small tailors' guild. Midwifery is also a rather more 'hands-on' activity than the usual task of preparing a sermon, although it is worth recalling Kierkegaard's 'maieutic' ideal of indirect communication. It will be remembered that he maintained this was a midwife for birthing the truth. This is usefully explored in Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art*, 1st edn (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999). The connections between preachers in the realm of philosophical ideas and the degree to which they are bound by their common struggles to communicate can only be suggested at this point.

Apprentices learn to think, argue, act, and interact in increasingly knowledgeable ways, with people who do something well, by doing it with them as legitimate, peripheral participants.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover the traditional sense of apprenticeship just noted was far from universally operative in the communities studied. More important to learning than imitation, instruction and oversight was the cluster of social and interpersonal factors, a dynamic which they named “legitimate peripheral participation.” ‘Legitimate’ here encompasses the idea that a group has an understanding of membership and belonging, and that an ability to perform a task (e.g. butchering meat) or to hold in common the corpus of professional knowledge (as in midwifery) is a feature of membership in that group. Learning is not only a matter of technique and knowledge, but involvement in a process in which the learner comes to understand their identity and their place or membership in the community of practice, as well as mastering a skill set. As Karen Handley et al. observe in their review of the concept of communities of practice in the *Journal of Management Studies*:

Situated learning theory brings a renewed or alternative focus on issues of identity. Learning is not simply about developing one’s knowledge and practice, it also involves a process of understanding who we are and in which communities of practice we belong and are accepted.<sup>7</sup>

That membership may be formally acknowledged, through certificates or ceremonies, or it may be implicitly known in the group through a range of subtle interpersonal codes and signals. There may be a publicly recognised member / non-member threshold, such as admission to the Bar, or the initially liminal status of the novice or newcomer or apprentice may be superseded in barely discernible stages. An illuminating example was given to me by Dr Hamish Macleod, Senior Lecturer at Moray House School of Education:

A colleague of mine has described this in the medical context as the day you receive the prescribing pad. You don’t suddenly know something that you didn’t know yesterday, yet the entire world has changed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jean Lave, 'The Culture of Acquisition and the Practice of Understanding', in *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*, ed. by J.W. Stigler, R.A. Shweder, and G.H. Herdt (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 311.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Handley, Andrew Sturdy et al., 'Within and Beyond Communities of Practice: Making Sense of Learning through Participation, Identity and Practice', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43 (2006), p. 644.

<sup>8</sup> In conversation, 13/11/2006.

In Lave and Wenger's groups, the initial peripheral status of the would-be practitioner is recognised and legitimated as a vital and necessary part of their development. Their insights are that:

...learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community.<sup>9</sup>

The newcomer's participation, peripheral at first, is an acknowledged locus for appropriate forms of learning, but Lave and Wenger's thesis is that moving through such peripheral or outsider status to become a fully-fledged member is not just a place for learning, it *is* learning. Identity is as important as skills acquisition in an analysis of learning.

The call that Wenger makes as we "become reflective with regard to our own discourse of learning"<sup>10</sup> is for this discourse to be enriched and resourced with the framework he proposes for considering learning in social terms, a framework that includes the concept of communities of practice. This idea was defined as:

A set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support for making sense of its heritage.<sup>11</sup>

Epistemologically, the concept shares in the 'departure from objectivism'<sup>12</sup> in educational theory (and theories of knowledge) towards situated and constructivist theories as I have discussed in earlier chapters.

The concept of communities of practice as the locus *and* the means of learning has been affirmed, criticized and refined in educational theory and business management studies. For example, it will be quickly seen that individuals are typically part of

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<sup>9</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Noted by Barab & Duffy in ch. 2 "Practice Fields to Communities of Practice" in David H. Jonassen, Susan M. Land et al., *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments [Electronic Resource]* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2000). Situated and constructivist theories view knowledge as mediated and socially-constructed, over and against a view of knowledge as objectively demonstrable through logical handling of abstract concepts assumed to have fixed meaning over time. Thus the equation  $[3 + 5 = 8]$  is safely in the latter category. On the other hand the statement, "those table manners are a sign of bad breeding" would have unquestionable and powerful meaning for one social group while being freely contested or considered meaningless by others. Without entering into a philosophical excursus on the verifiability of theological knowledge, I should say that I am proceeding with awareness that there are metaphysical quicksands to the left and the right.

many, sometimes overlapping communities, developing practices and identities for themselves that also interact. A comprehensive explanatory model becomes quite difficult. Handley et al. note that “considerable variation exists around how communities of practice are described and characterized... It would seem that communities of practice are heterogeneous across several dimensions such as geographic spread, lifecycle and pace of evolution.”<sup>13</sup> Separating and identifying influences and how an individual’s status and self-identity are determined becomes extremely difficult, and may leave us with a term that is too indeterminate for empirical investigation.

A common-sense understanding of the term ‘participation’ is also potentially problematic for the theory. Defining it more broadly than ‘mere engagement in practice,’<sup>14</sup> Wenger argues that participation becomes a source of identity and is a ‘constituent of meaning’ that is negotiated through mutual recognition of individuals in social relation to one another. Wenger’s justification is that “the concept of participation is meant to capture this profoundly social character of our experience of life.”<sup>15</sup> Wenger’s use of the word ‘participation’ casts such a wide net that almost every activity and indeed some *non*-activity counts as participation if the individual is working with, working against, not working at all, conscious of, unconscious of, or in any way subject to the past influence of other people. At the same time, as pointed out by Handley et al. there is an ambiguity introduced by the important but difficult to measure distinction between the ‘peripheral’ participation of the novice and the ‘full’ participation of the master.<sup>16</sup> They recommend further research to identify more precisely the kinds of participation that may be meaningfully open to individuals involved in communities of practice. This is well beyond the scope of the present research and so we must be aware of these weaknesses and limitations of the concept when applying it to the learning experiences of preachers.

Further, Brown and Duguid note that:

The apprenticeship-like activity that Lave and Wenger describe is found not only on the shop floor, but throughout the highest reaches of education and beyond. In the last years of graduate school or internships, scientists, humanists, doctors, architects or lawyers, after years of schoolroom training, learn their craft in the company of professional mentors. Here they form learning

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<sup>13</sup> Handley, Sturdy et al., ‘Within and Beyond Communities of Practice: Making Sense of Learning through Participation, Identity and Practice’, p. 646.

<sup>14</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Handley, ‘Within and Beyond Communities of Practice’, p. 652.

communities capable of generating, sharing and deploying highly esoteric knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

There are two questions that arise from this observation for us. The first is whether the way the church trains or develops those called to a preaching ministry is anything like as intentional, intense and organised as the white collar professions noted here. The field studies in my research are an attempt to broaden the search for such practices in the experience of participants.

The second question that needs to be considered is the role of the “professional mentor” in communities of practice as Lave and Wenger have defined it and as the concept applies to developing preachers. For some, the interventionist influence on the learner of the mentor as teacher is in philosophical tension with situationist approaches which hold that what forms the learner is a matrix of influences including the unwritten codes of behaviour, the formal and informal notions of membership in a community of practitioners, and the identity and meaning-constructing practices of group and individual. But as Brown and Duguid implied in the last quotation, mentor-like activity is prevalent in many fields, and I am taking the position that mentors both contribute to the situated learning matrix *and* provide an important means of access for the student to objectified knowledge and ideals of good practice. I will be discussing mentoring later in this chapter.

## **Negotiating meaning in the community of practice**

As Wenger formulates the concept in his later work there are three dimensions of a community of practice: “a community of mutual engagement, a negotiated enterprise, and a repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time.”<sup>18</sup> I will now examine these dimensions and suggest correspondences and limitations in the theory for the preacher learning to preach.

### **Dimension 1: A community of mutual engagement**

Wenger’s community of practice is for the most part characterised by mutual engagement, and this engagement is usually marked by practices that make that engagement possible. Thus the insurance claims processors in his primary case study come to the office and do their work there, with talking and interactivity, in pretty consistent proximal location to one another.<sup>19</sup> The office space and the social interaction are just as important to the understanding of what it means to do their

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<sup>17</sup> Brown and Duguid, *The Social Life of Information*, p. 126.

<sup>18</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 72ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.



work as the kinds of practices and techniques that are part of being technically proficient in their work. It also means that there is almost constantly the means to share information and techniques required to solve problems thrown up in the course of their work. Citing Julian Orr's work, Lave and Wenger noted how copier repair technicians add to one another's proficiency with a form of storytelling:

Technicians who repair copier machines tell each other "war stories" about their past experiences in making repairs. Such stories constitute a vital part of diagnosing and carrying out new repairs. In the process, newcomers learn how to make (sometimes difficult) repairs, they learn the skills of war-story telling, and they become legitimate participants in the community of practice.<sup>20</sup>

Lave and Wenger are saying that this participation and informal engagement with one another is more than just the context for learning, where "talk about" a practice leads to learning. There is also "talking within" a practice that is a crucial mark of membership in the community, and this they say is a key to a fuller picture of how the newcomer progresses to greater proficiency.<sup>21</sup>

In what ways and to what degree do Christian ministers consider themselves part of a community of mutual engagement? Of course the preacher is occasionally encouraged to think of the historical "company of preachers"<sup>22</sup> of which he or she is a part, and it is true that this sense of tradition, nourished by literature going back nearly two thousand years, provides considerable depth to the idea. What the engagement lacks from the perspective of Wenger's concept is mutuality, made possible by temporal and geographical proximity. Problem solving, swapping solutions such as sermon illustrations, and telling 'war stories' should be part of the building up of the practitioner's competence and skills set as well as establishing status or rank, and self-identity as a preacher.

Would the existence of a peer group of preachers form a meaningful community of practice? This of course represents a straightforward take on the concept, illustrated as being composed of practitioners engaged in the same enterprise, or component parts of a task or job. Could I apply systematically to groups of preachers the criteria

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<sup>20</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, p. 109. They quote Julian E. Orr 'Sharing knowledge, celebrating identity : community memory in a service culture' in David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Lischer, in the introduction to his book of the same name explains that the company of preachers arises from "the mistranslation of Psalm 68:11 in the *Great Bible* of 1560 later immortalized by Handel in *The Messiah*: 'The Lord gave the word: great was the company of the preachers.'" (Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. xiii.)

Wenger developed for communities of practice?<sup>23</sup> To conform to the model, there should be newcomers who have just been ordained or licensed as well as ‘old timers’ who have been preaching for many years, and who carry higher status. Yet it seems true that the preacher often ‘ploughs a lonely furrow.’ The minister, priest or pastor is frequently the primary occupant of the pulpit in his or her church, with little contact with or experience of the preaching and sermons of others. Even in the case of Methodist Circuits who use a rota of preachers shared among their churches, and in which a Local Preacher may find himself preaching to a different congregation Sunday by Sunday, the preaching task remains a solo activity, at least up until the final moments of delivering the sermon, and the question must be asked what kind of regular interaction and relationships do the Local Preachers have one with another? Would a sense of community be found in the empirical studies?

If it is not, the concept may yet be of value. We can ask if preaching can be seen as a shared enterprise involving a community in a close and/or formal, functional relationship with a preacher. In this respect it seemed fair to say that individual preaching acts are judged according to criteria shared by the worshipping congregation and variously expressed over centuries of theological tradition. There are questions demanded of a sermon that arise from the shared understanding and shared traditions of the community. Does the sermon reveal God? Is the soteriological kerygma of Jesus explicated in a way that touches the listeners? Does the sermon engage with or amplify or contradict the meaning of Scripture? Does it sound like a sermon, that is, is the preacher speaking with authority, or as an expert, or as a compassionate pastor, or as a wise philosopher or theologian?<sup>24</sup>

The idea of shared understandings and how these ‘objective’ structures interact with the subjective experiences of the individual is explored by social anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu, through the concept of *habitus*.<sup>25</sup>

Through traditions the community, in common with religious communities in most

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<sup>23</sup> He lists fourteen “indicators that a community of practice has formed” in Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>24</sup> There are of course many different sermon types with different functions, and many of these are outlined most helpfully by David Schlafer in David J. Schlafer, *Playing with Fire: Preaching Work as Kindling Art* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2004). His grid ‘Preaching Parents: A gallery of caricatures’ reminds us that for each sermon type (e.g. lecture, censure, legal defense, sales talk) there is a primary purpose (such as, respectively, to inform, correct, convince, or attract).

<sup>25</sup> From the Latin *habitus* for style of dress, the term ‘habitus’ has been used by social anthropologists such as Pierre Bourdieu et al. to refer to the ways in which an individual’s knowledge or ability to perform their actions (the ‘gestus’) is the result of and enabled by that individual’s internalisation of the social structures of which he/she is a part. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

human cultures, extends over time in significant ways. Recall David Schlafer's observation in the last chapter that the preacher has 'the ghosts of his preaching parents' present when he is preaching.<sup>26</sup> These preaching parents are obviously not in the 'hands-on' master-apprentice relationship described by Lave and Wenger, but they are immensely significant, for they have shaped the preacher, far more than many preachers seem to realise. Thus the community of practice may not be the "company of preachers", but the community of faith, even conceived as the great "cloud of witnesses"<sup>27</sup> dispersed over time as well as space. These keep a check on wilder flights of fancy and heretical wanderings. They also provide a pool or source for inspiration. All this points to a need to expand the concept of community of practice to include the preachers and theologians of the past who shape and influence a preacher's present practice.

Thus we come closer to the idea of mutual engagement by viewing the sermon as a 'social act'. The preacher is the primary agent or mouthpiece of the act, but the act exists because of the listeners: the declaiming of oratory in an empty space would be devoid of meaning.<sup>28</sup> Unlike for example, music, which can be meaningfully performed as a solo activity, preaching is an act of communication and a social enterprise. The preacher is seldom a "voice crying in the wilderness," a Lone Ranger or gun-for-hire.<sup>29</sup> The preacher in most churches is in a highly complex relationship with listeners and the structures that have ordained, licensed, permitted or encouraged him to speak. Wenger notes:

In real life, mutual relations among participants are complex mixtures of power and dependence, pleasure and pain, expertise and helplessness, success and failure, amassment and deprivation, alliance and competition, ease and struggle, authority and collegiality, resistance and compliance, anger and tenderness, attraction and repugnance, fun and boredom, trust and suspicion, friendship and hatred. Communities of practice have it all.<sup>30</sup>

The preacher, especially in so far as he or she has pastoral and other ministerial relationships to the congregation that cannot be entirely separated from the ministry of preaching, will understand and be deeply affected by virtually all of these modes

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<sup>26</sup> Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word*, p. 33ff.

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>28</sup> Or possibly a sign of madness. To adapt the old philosophical riddle, if a tree falls on a preacher that no-one is listening to, does anyone care?

<sup>29</sup> With the important but nevertheless rare exception of the prophetic voice speaking very much from outside the institution.

<sup>30</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 77.

of community and personal relationships. How can they not make significant impact on the learning of the preacher? In the field studies I will be looking for evidence of ‘mutual engagement’ to see whether and in what ways preachers learn in communities of practice. But there is more to being a community of practice than mutual engagement.

## **Dimension 2: A negotiated enterprise**

The *habitus* or shared understandings and traditions that make possible the sermon, as a part of the ministry of the word in the Church’s acts of liturgical worship, also mark it as a ‘negotiated enterprise.’ Wenger makes three points about such an enterprise:

- 1) It is the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement.
- 2) It is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control.
- 3) It is not just a stated goal, but creates among participants relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of the practice.<sup>31</sup>

One illustration of a collective process of negotiation in the preaching enterprise is contained in the questions asked and judgements made about the sermon based on scripture and the traditions and self-understanding of the church, some of which I rehearsed above. A few homileticians have called for rather more negotiation, as this might result in better sermons leading to more effective communication acts between God and his listening people.<sup>32</sup> When this is done, whether in intentional or unconscious ways, the resultant preaching is almost always strongly located in the time, place and context of its delivery. This reinforces the understanding of preaching that it is (or ought to be) a deeply significant aspect of the triangular relationship between the preacher, the congregation, and God. Such is the low state of preaching in many mainline denominations that ‘mutual accountability’ has turned

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See Mark Greene, *The Three-Eared Preacher*, (London: LICC, 1996), John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), Ron Boyd-MacMillan, *Explosive Preaching* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005) and Roger Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005). Also see Edwina Hunter, ‘The Preacher as a Social Being’, in *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology & Practice*, ed. by A. Van Seters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988).

into something of a blaming exercise over why so much preaching is ineffective, dull, or irrelevant – but addressing that goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

For my purposes it is useful to consider whether the ‘mutual accountability’ that Wenger refers to resides, with respect to preaching, in the church community to the same extent as in his sample community of insurance claim processors. He states:

Negotiating a joint enterprise gives rise to relations of mutual accountability among those involved. These relations of accountability include what matters and what does not, what is important and why it is important, what to do and not to do, what to pay attention to and what to ignore, what to talk about and what to leave unsaid, what to justify and what to take for granted...<sup>33</sup>

This describes very well the sensitivities that a seasoned pastor-cum-preacher brings to the pulpit, and indeed to the study when planning a sermon. Sermon-speech is tightly restricted, with pitfalls for the careless and many forbidden words, unacceptable themes and inappropriate modes of speech. On the other side of the relationship, the preacher may have expectations of the congregation that are highly specialised and particular. S/he may expect to be able speak to them about things that no other human may ever confront them with, challenging them at a personal level about such things as their relationship with God, their ethical behaviour, their sense of self-hood, their approach to death (and to life), and their political orientation. Wenger’s remarks about the positives of what he calls a process rather than a static agreement could serve as something of a noble ideal for a preacher and congregation:

The whole process is as generative as it is constraining. It pushes the practice forward as much as it keeps it in check. An enterprise both engenders and directs social energy. It spurs action as much as it gives it focus. It involves our impulses and emotions as much as it controls them. It invites new ideas as much as it sorts them out. An enterprise is a resource of coordination, of sense-making, of mutual engagement; it is like rhythm to music.<sup>34</sup>

Notwithstanding what a wonderful picture of preacher – congregational interaction this would make, it should be acknowledged that the ‘negotiated response’ is still unbalanced and unequal. Creating the sermon gives to the preacher an ownership and responsibility that congregations will probably never feel. Indeed the differing status of each in this particular transaction makes that unlikely if not theoretically

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<sup>33</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

impossible. The preacher, having come down from the pulpit to address fellow pilgrims, may now seldom be “six foot above congregation,” but still remains the principal and enabling agent of the sermon, and unless overcome by an unusual sense of communitarian ideals, will probably always refer to what has been planned as “my sermon”. The dimension of mutual accountability in Wenger’s analysis is stretched to apply to the preacher’s community of practice, but I believe it is still usable.

### **Dimension 3: A shared repertoire**

The idea of a shared repertoire as constitutive of a community of practice requires a little more unpacking in order to explore how it might throw light on the development of the preacher-in-community. According to Wenger, “the repertoire of a community of practice includes, routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence and which have become part of its practice.”<sup>35</sup> These are all “resources for negotiating meaning.” For a preaching community of mouthpiece plus listeners, if I may describe it mechanically, the sermon act is marked by a wide range of practices that vary from denomination to denomination. Whether the sermon follows the reading of Scripture or precedes the Eucharist, whether it is a six minute homily or a forty-five minute exposition, whether it teaches, exhorts, proclaims or persuades, whether it is delivered in stentorian tones from a symbolically significant pulpit or on chancel steps in a casual, conversational tone, the community is in general agreement about the range of resources that are available to them in order for the sermon act to take place.

The repertoire of resources, according to Wenger, combines two characteristics: a history of mutual engagement, and an inherent ambiguity. The importance of history of mutual engagement should be clear, for the preacher develops a relationship over time with listeners, and it is on the basis of that relationship that understandings develop about the form and content that sermons should take. In addition to the sermonic forms mentioned above (and by no means exhaustively), the orthodoxy that is expected, the rhetorical manner (for instance, whether humour may be employed), the amount of logic, argument, story or poetry – these may all be quite fixed when a new minister arrives to preach. Or they may each be open for negotiation and development into the shared repertoire of practices.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Wenger's concept of ambiguity in the repertoire of resources is also apt for my purposes, for it is ambiguity that enables a space in which present-day interpretations of what it means to live as a Christian, as individuals and as a community, may be negotiated and constructed by the preacher and the community. Ambiguity also arises because the listener makes his or her own sermon out of the words and tone of voice and facial expressions of the preacher. Preaching is famously ambiguous in this sense, as evidence continues to support anecdotal reports that what is heard by congregations rarely matches or corresponds closely to what preachers say.<sup>36</sup> Unlike a lecture which students hear and assiduously notate, aware of the examination or essay in which they must accurately reflect what was said in order to achieve a passing mark, sermons are seldom studied by listeners. Particularly in post-modern cultural contexts, as discussed in my Introduction, sermon listeners are implicitly given freedom to attend to, hear, and apply to their own devotional and ethical lives whatever seems right to them from the sermon. Yet this is not entirely open-ended, for the preacher usually has another shot at expressing orthodoxy, and furthermore, as we have noted, the enterprise is bound by tradition, expressed scripturally, liturgically and in the hymnody in many, though not all Christian traditions.

My exploration of Lave and Wenger's concept of the community of practice represents one attempt to describe the social nature of the preaching act. One particular and acknowledged limitation in applying their theory is the lack of peer practitioners in the typical setting for regular, Sunday by Sunday congregational setting. The concept is strained when applied to this situation if the preacher is considered as the only practitioner. Nevertheless, and although the relationships of the preacher's community of practice may lack full equality and reciprocity, there is still enough mutual engagement, shared enterprise and a range of negotiated resources to justify a modified version of the theory, in order to address adequately the understanding of preaching as a social act. The modified version of the concept might be termed a "community of agreed sermonic enterprises." It will be tested in the field studies in chapters 6, 7 and 8. If we can see ways in which this paradigm explains what is already happening to some degree, we will have the beginnings of a

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<sup>36</sup> Ron Boyd-Macmillan refers to results of some informal surveys on sermon retention in the United States in Boyd-MacMillan, *Explosive Preaching*, pp. 182-183. According to him, 51 percent remembered one point, but it was never the main one. 10 percent remembered more than one point, but the more points they remembered, the more points they invented. 37 percent could not remember any points at all. It is not difficult to back this up with studies from the world of educational theory that demonstrate the weakness of the expository lecture style as a means of effective teaching, and every student of preaching should acknowledge the force of the criticisms of preaching as a mode of teaching, forcefully expressed in Norrington, *To Preach or Not to Preach?*

theoretical basis for enhancing the learning experiences of preachers – and those of the congregations who are in the senses I have described, learning partners in preaching. I will seek to develop this concept in Chapter 9, following my analysis of the empirical findings

## ***Part 2: Mentoring and peer learning***

Situated learning and a social view of knowledge are often focused in the relationship between the learner and a mentor. The term ‘mentor’ has been used in many different ways, but usually with connotations of the more experienced, practiced and /or wiser person helping the newcomer or neophyte in ways that will develop them and help them on their journey to similar mastery.

Mentoring goes beyond affirming the student’s goals and ambitions, and helping with their self-understanding and thus their call or vocation, fundamental though these things are. It is traditionally a relationship of shaping and influencing the student through the task or developmental period facing the student, and is thus seen as an adjunct to the educational process.

The idea of mentoring as adjunct or aid to learning not only draws on extensive scholarly literature, but goes beyond that to an archetypal significance in human learning experience. Thus what educationalist Laurent Daloz derives from Dante’s *Inferno* and extended tellings of student stories<sup>37</sup> encourages us to ask questions of the student experiences of their mentors that help us to build ‘thick descriptions’ of mentoring.<sup>38</sup>

The original Mentor is usually taken to be the Greek character, described by Homer as a wise and trusted counsellor.<sup>39</sup> As it is used today, the term ‘mentor’ is often either combined with or contrasted with coaching, and in Christian contexts, with discipling. The words are occasionally used in contradictory or inconsistent ways,

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<sup>37</sup> Laurent A. Daloz, *Mentor* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> As with any discourse analysis, there are layers of experience and self-understanding that were not revealed in the field study interviews in my project. Arguably there are psychological depths and individual stories which could have been elicited, but which would have required a research project with rather more narrow focus.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Dr M. H. M. Munro Turner writes on his website, ‘Mentoring For Change’: “Homer's Mentor (whether as himself or as the embodiment of Pallas Athene) is not the model for modern mentors. The word actually didn't feature in the English language until 1750. Its appearance resulted from the story *Les Aventures de Tálámaque* by the 17th century French writer Fenelon in which Mentor was the main character. *Les Aventures de Tálámaque* went on to become the most reprinted book of the 18th century and led to the word ‘mentor’ being resurrected after a gap of nearly three millennia. It is Fenelon’s Mentor, not Homer’s, that forms the basis for modern usage of the word.” (<[http://www.mentoringforchange.co.uk/snippets/which\\_mentor.php](http://www.mentoringforchange.co.uk/snippets/which_mentor.php)> [Accessed 12/05/2008].)



and the reader may note that the business world uses mentoring and coaching in opposite ways- that is to say a mentor handles developing skills within the organisation and a coach helps the worker with his attitude and vision. Here, at least as a starting point, mentoring is taken to have as its focus attitudes, values and vision. Coaching is more concerned with skill issues and the development of talents for practical application. Mentoring styles are typically reflective, and generally non-directive, while coaching tends to be experiential and tries to be prescriptive. Mentoring can involve being something of a guide, introducing the student to the culture of the organisation and the community's hidden values. Coaching focuses on elements of practice, the development of skills and the uncovering and correction of faults. This is not a hard and fast distinction or definition, but I am using it as a starting point for my discussion where the term mentoring will be nuanced.

In the current climate and general practice of higher education in the UK the ethos of mentoring is separate from that of teaching. This is clearly to the detriment of teaching, as Cedric Cullingford points out in the introduction to his book on the training and development of teachers:

Mentoring emphasises all those aspects that teachers used to cherish, and which are now taken on by ancillary workers, classroom assistants and others whilst teachers are re-branded as managers.<sup>40</sup>

He implies that there is a hands-on, involved and engaged quality to mentoring that teachers are being steered away from, rather like being promoted 'upstairs' and away from the 'shop floor' where their skills and interests lie. This prevents them from being in a mentor-like relationship with any of their charges. Theological educators in Higher Education would no doubt also recognise the trends by which their jobs become consumed with administration and planning. They can find that they become managers and 'course providers' with more paper work and less student contact time.

The difference between the mentor and the teacher has also come to represent something of the ideological divide and ongoing debate between models of learner-centred education and teacher-centred education. Cullingford notes:

Whilst at the earlier stages of learning the teacher, as the prime source of information and instruction, is assumed to dominate,

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<sup>40</sup> Cedric Cullingford, ed., *Mentoring in Education: An International Perspective, Monitoring Change in Education*. (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 1.

such a model cannot survive when the learners themselves become autonomous.<sup>41</sup>

The self-direction of the adult learner and the learner's right to have some control of the learning process is being invoked here, as it is apparently assumed that enduring the domination of a teacher is strictly appropriate to early stages of learning.

Mentoring, on the other hand, 'goes' with later stages of learning:

The concept of learning by precept and example, of being instructed to develop certain practices and fine tune a personal style of delivery, brings in the instructor, the coach, the advisor, and, of course, what we now term the mentor.<sup>42</sup>

Shelly Cunningham also looked at mentoring in the workplace, focussing on faculty members in Christian Higher Education. In her introduction she writes:

Mentoring has been the relationship of choice for professional development in the business arena for many years. A mentoring relationship involves a more experienced professional serving as a supportive and guiding role model for another professional who is less experienced in the field... The business world has implemented formal and informal mentoring programs. What is happening in academe?<sup>43</sup>

E.L. Smither, writing in his PhD thesis on mentoring in the life and teachings of Augustine of Hippo, notes how mentoring is virtually inherent in the practices of the early church as new believers were helped in their development.

Mentoring or discipleship, as portrayed in the early Christian writings, was the work of one Christian helping another disciple or group of disciples grow in their knowledge and application of the teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures. Put another way, the mentor coached his disciples toward realizing the fullness of their salvation. A mentoring relationship was a personal and caring relationship between disciples committed to this common goal.<sup>44</sup>

The identification of a mentoring relationship within the faith community as "personal and caring" can be seen to a greater or lesser extent in most views of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Shelly Cunningham, 'The Nature of Workplace Mentoring Relationships among Faculty Members in Christian Higher Education', *The Journal of Higher Education*, 70 (1999), p. 443.

<sup>44</sup> Edward L. Smither, 'Principles of Mentoring Spiritual Leaders in the Pastoral Ministry of Augustine of Hippo', University of Wales, 2006), p. 27. He also notes that, "while no exact equivalent for the term 'mentoring' exists in early Christian texts, there are however, other associated words that work together to express the concept. For example, we find verbs like 'to make disciples' (matheteuō); 'to teach' (didaskō); 'to train' (didaxō); 'to be sound' (hugiainō); and 'to follow' (akalouthēō); as well as nouns like 'disciple' (mathētēs); 'teacher' (didaskalos); 'imitator' (mimētēs); and 'training' (didachē)" (p. 17).

mentoring. Disinterested advice would not be enough to indicate a mentor helping a mentee. Not unconnected to the personal aspects of a mentor-mentee relationship, some writers on mentoring have also pointed out the tension that can arise when the mentor is also required by organisational structures to act as gatekeeper for the organisation or institution. If the mentor is required to assess formally, to make judgements, to evaluate work that will contribute to a final mark of a course or training programme, the mentor has taken on a gatekeeper's role. This has been noted as a restriction on the learning that student teachers can receive from supervisors. Boud and Middleton, note that "staff can have difficulties in trusting supervisors to facilitate their learning because of supervisors' formal role in surveillance of staff and the need for individuals to portray themselves as competent workers."<sup>45</sup>

Finally, as I noted in an earlier paper, a study of mentoring in educational contexts could be valuable for indicating the kinds of relationships and expectations appropriate for student preachers.<sup>46</sup> The educational authors McIntyre and Hagger propose a tiered model for mentoring relationships.<sup>47</sup>

Student teachers benefit most from mentoring with aspects of:

1. peer support
2. personal guidance and challenge
3. planned and managed curriculum.

Mentoring for qualified and employed teachers would be characterised by:

1. peer support
2. personal guidance and challenge

Mentoring for head teachers should consist principally of peer support.

I commented on this in an earlier paper:

Best practice in theological education does broadly reflect this wisdom. In much Anglican training (in my experience) the pre-ordination student's curriculum is neither the result of rubrics rigidly applied, nor merely the result of personal choice, but planned and managed by the student in consultation with staff. In service, the ordained minister would not receive curriculum

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<sup>45</sup> David Boud and Heather Middleton, 'Learning from Others at Work: Communities of Practice and Informal Learning', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 15:5 (2003), p. 194. They cite C. Hughes, 'Issues in Supervisory Facilitation', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 24:1 (2002).

<sup>46</sup> Stevenson, *Conceptions of Learning in the Preacher's Progress*, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Donald McIntyre and Hazel Hagger, *Mentors in Schools: Developing the Profession of Teaching* (London: David Fulton, 1996).

management, but can reasonably expect personal guidance and challenge, as well as peer support ...Applying this particularly to preaching training, however, should make us question the support structures that exist for mentoring.<sup>48</sup>

A major implication for the training of preachers is that a range of learning methods involving peers, instructors and mentors should be employed. A second implication is that mentoring continues to have value even for those who have completed initial periods of training.

## **Discussion of three church examples**

### **A Baptist perspective**

In the UK and American churches, the term often used for a mentor-like role is supervision. Thus for example in a Southern Baptist (USA) manual, the authors identify seven supervisory styles, namely work evaluation mode, instructor mode, apprentice mode, training mode, resource mode, consultative mode, and spiritual guide mode.<sup>49</sup>

It was interesting to note that out of 32 areas of supervisory exploration or 'evaluation issues' in this manual, none refers explicitly to preaching. One sample question to ask of the minister under supervision is, "Are you able to teach others utilizing a variety of teaching methodologies based on the various learning styles?" A second question investigates communication skills: "Are you able to communicate effectively with others through verbal and written means? Are you able to articulate ideas on a variety of levels so that people of differing ages and backgrounds might understand you on their own levels?"<sup>50</sup> These questions would seem to reflect a particular paradigm of preaching that limits it to a form of Christian education, but even so, it is perplexing that there is not more that the authors would have the supervisor evaluate in the minister's pulpit activity.

### **An Anglican perspective**

In Anglican churches in England, curates recently ordained as deacons usually work for two years for a parish church or group of churches under the close supervision of a vicar or rector. This supervisor is officially termed a 'Training Incumbent'. Keith Lamdin and David Tilley provide and explore models of supervision in a recent handbook on supporting new ministers. Referencing Alan Wilson who described in

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<sup>48</sup> Stevenson, *Conceptions of Learning in the Preacher's Progress*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> Pyle and Seals, *Experiencing Ministry Supervision*, p. 89.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

theological terms ministerial supervision in the Oxford Diocese, they state that “the role of the training incumbent integrates four constituent roles: manager, educator, mediator and supporter.”<sup>51</sup> The manager has the job of overseeing the work of the junior colleague in order to preserve the smooth and efficient running of the organization. Examples include “how well and how often the curate preaches” as well as checking administrative abilities such as record-keeping. Their theological gloss on this role refers to the ordained minister’s calling to be a *steward* and a *shepherd*. When supervision is practised as management like this, the curate’s learning is assumed to align with his or her acquisition of demonstrable competency in certain prescribed areas. In this arrangement, it would seem that the needs of the organization take priority over the needs of the learning individual. Although the style of management may exacerbate or ameliorate this to some degree, I would question whether some ideals of mentoring as noted earlier are compromised here.

The supervising minister is also called to act as educator for the trainee minister, “explaining how things are done, particularly in the local parish, and enabling the gifts of the individual to emerge, to be used in ministry and to develop.”<sup>52</sup> He or she may from time to time function as a mediator on behalf of the curate, or between the curate and bodies and persons such as the church congregation and diocesan officials. Finally the supervising minister will act as supporter, which the authors principally define as “a caring but dispassionate function of giving objective support.”<sup>53</sup> The role they invoke for this expressed theologically is pastor, and in this respect the curate is potentially able to receive the “wise and trusted” counsel of a mentor, although experiences naturally vary quite considerably. The mentoring offered by the Training Incumbent, on the account given here, seems particularly shaped by the needs of the organization, both in its national and local guises. The range of responsibilities of the supervisory minister for the curate is to be affirmed, and could with adaptation form the basis for supervisory relationships in other denominations.

### **A Methodist perspective**

The Methodist Church of Great Britain has one of the most comprehensively organized, resourced and documented structures for training and developing Local Preachers. Mentoring is also part of an induction process, guiding the student into the

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<sup>51</sup> Keith Lamdin and D. Tilley, *Supporting New Ministers in the Local Church* (London: SPCK, 2007), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

ways of the institution, its habits and discourse. Within the Methodist training structure, prospective Local Preachers have a Mentor assigned to them. Mentoring as supervision and instruction is also built into the Note and Trial process through the assignment to the student of a supervising minister who will be their Local Preachers' Tutor (abbreviated hereafter as LPT). Thus when they have 'received a Note to preach,' a prospective Local Preacher will accompany her or his LPT to services where the LPT is preaching and conducting the service. In this phase the student is mainly observing, although he or she may preach a sermon within a service planned by the LPT. Principally the mentoring is that of providing a role model (inviting imitation), and that of the teacher-didact (imparting knowledge and theoretical models). Within the personal relationship, there is scope for influencing character and shaping theological conviction, both of which contribute to the making of the preacher.

When and if the student is placed 'On Trial', they are fully tasked with planning, conducting and preaching at a number of services. The LPT is in the position of providing formative evaluation of the student's work, as well as arranging for evaluative feedback from others from the local church and within a structured setting following the service.

While the student is On Trial there is potential for a very close relationship of coaching, giving attention to the student's practical work in all of its phases. In this study though, there was little evidence that the tutor-student relationships worked on this level. Amongst other constraints, the lack of time required for such a relationship would be a factor, and it would seem to go beyond the role of the Local Preachers' Tutor as conceived institutionally. Furthermore, as Cullingford observes, the mentoring relationship is perhaps crucially compromised when assessment and the marking of work is built into it, when the individual who exists to induct the neophyte into the organisation also stands as a gatekeeper, as we have discussed earlier.<sup>54</sup>

### **Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL)**

Peer-assisted learning has had many advocates and enthusiasts, although many of these are concerned with programmes, procedures and strategy within the realm of child education.<sup>55</sup> It refers to any of a number of educational practices that involve

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<sup>54</sup> Cullingford, ed., *Mentoring in Education*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Lynn S Fuchs, Douglas Fuchs et al., 'Enhancing First-Grade Children's Mathematical Development with Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies.' *School Psychology Review*, 31 (2002), P.G.

two or more individuals working together on their learning, as equals, and in a structured way. Another common description is “students cooperating to learn.” Peer group learning activities can include assessment, feedback, tutoring and teaching. “Students cooperating to learn” is typically favoured where students are being trained for work situations where team work is expected.<sup>56</sup> A useful book, both as introduction and compendium of methods of peer group work is Nancy Falchikov’s 2001 work on peer group learning in higher education. Principles of peer group learning that Falchikov outlines are, firstly that learning groups usually involve students from the same cohort. Secondly, students must take an active part in the process of learning. Thirdly, criteria for evaluation and outcomes must be made very explicit. Fourthly, activities are usually used for formative rather than summative purposes, though they may involve awarding marks.<sup>57</sup>

But how relevant is it to learning preaching? Giving feedback following a sermon is an activity where peer involvement may be of significant value in a preacher’s development. This requires the careful construction of a safe environment, a shared understanding of the parameters of the craft, and the limits of criticism, as well as showing sensitivity for the emotional stress and personal involvement experienced in preaching a sermon. Under such conditions peer feedback can be intelligent, focussed and helpful to the whole peer group. Barbara K Lundblad, Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York, writes:

The practicum group is the locus for the most intensive practicing ... The small group may be the best place for students to discuss their theologies of preaching and learn to honor differences among them. Students can practice communal interpretation of texts, receive feedback on sermon theme or focus, or practice a possible sermon introduction.<sup>58</sup>

In my own teaching of preaching I have found particular value in the construction of a practical learning environment where students are given the opportunity, structure and guidelines to discuss one another’s sermons. This has been marked by strong student engagement, fruitful exchanges and positive evaluations. The benefits can be

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Mathes, J. K. Howard et al., 'Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies for First-Grade Readers: Responding to the Needs of Diverse Learners', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33 (1998), and Keith J. Topping and Stewart W. Ehly, *Peer-Assisted Learning* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Nancy Falchikov, 'Group Process Analysis: Self and Peer Assessment of Working Together in a Group', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* (online journal), 30 (1993), p. 275.

<sup>57</sup> Nancy Falchikov, *Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> Barbara K. Lundblad, “Designing the introductory course in preaching” in Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching*, pp. 207-222.

intellectual. As Christine Blair points out in her study of adult learning in theological education, “reflection is strengthened when adults can return to the subject matter several times in different ways.”<sup>59</sup> But the benefit – and the learning – can go deeper than levels of conceptual understanding for some students.

One student wrote to me:

One of the most helpful learning experiences for preaching has been an optional group for preaching practice, as part of our homiletics class ... A key part to this learning was being part of a group that learned to grow in trust of each other and thereby be able to listen and learn from the criticisms made... The group was able to go to a deeper level of trust than perhaps in a parish setting might, because everyone was in a position of learning. It also felt like the criticism was part of our act of worship - all working together to build the kingdom of God.<sup>60</sup>

As indicated above, a group of peers are also capable of generating and experiencing aspects of community that not only contribute to the learning, but as Wenger argued, are constitutive of the learning process. This is illustrated in the following story from Wardlaw’s *Learning Preaching*:

Robert knocked at my office door. He stopped by to let me know that a group of my former preaching students had been out for a pizza the night before to talk once again about their preaching ministry. A sense of bonding had occurred during their time together in the preaching class, and they still continued to meet to share ideas and experiences, and to be a support and challenge for one another. They could not let go of this experience of community they had found in the classroom.<sup>61</sup>

As Wardlaw notes, strong affective motivations for learning were fostered within a community of peers, and this is consonant with the insights of adult learning theories when they emphasise that, according to Eugene Tester, “adults learn best in a community atmosphere fostering cooperation, caring, and mutual respect.”<sup>62</sup> This will become especially apparent when we consider the experience of the young Methodist preachers in Field Study Three.

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<sup>59</sup> Christine Eaton Blair, 'Understanding Adult Learners: Challenges for Theological Education', *Theological Education*, 34 (1997), p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> Email received from former student Sarah Brown, 25/10/2008, and used with permission.

<sup>61</sup> Wardlaw and Baumer, *Learning Preaching: Understanding and Participating in the Process*, p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Eugene Tester in “The Biblical Andragogy Clinic” in Knowles, *Andragogy in Action*.



Preaching is a craft of language, and a craft that is learnt through participation in the linguistic community, as Wittgenstein argued.<sup>63</sup> A community of peers can contribute to this language development, although the mentor or experienced practitioner will be more significant in this respect, passing on the values of the community and imparting the 'correct' ways of using the language.

Yet there may be a fundamental cultural divergence between the act of preaching and PAL.<sup>64</sup> As we shall see in the field studies, the preachers responding to my surveys and questions acknowledged or spoke about very little experience of learning from peers. Is the resistance in practice or absence of peer assisted learning among ministers simply down to patterns of solo ministry? Or is it that students in training for the ministry are not considered to need significant practice in cooperative learning and task achievement? Or is it that there is something more fundamental in the authoritarian stance of traditional preaching that diverges at a philosophical level from the equality and community required by peer learning?<sup>65</sup> This is an area where further theological research will be very important.

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<sup>63</sup> As advanced through metaphors such as 'language games' in the posthumously published Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1953). Here we veer again towards the epistemological heart of the learning question, namely the nature of participation in the community of practice that leads to and counts as learning. Is knowing-in-action to be achieved through trial and error, observation and imitation or absorption of codified principles? All three have their advocates, and rest upon philosophical positions that are beyond the scope of this thesis to explore.

<sup>64</sup> A term-search of websites showing the words "preaching" and "peer-assisted" shows a great majority use the word preaching in a secular sense and usually in a derogatory way to refer to a mode of educational delivery that contrasts with or militates against peer-assisted learning. Such searches are of limited value for sociological research, but they can give a kind of a snapshot of society's current linguistic usage of the terms in question.  
<<http://www.google.co.uk/search?num=30&hl=en&newwindow=1&q=preaching+%22peer-assisted%22&btnG=Search&meta=>> [Accessed 22 October 2008].

<sup>65</sup> Several writers on homiletics have portrayed this as an issue where feminist theology can bring essential insights. Thus Eunjo Mary Kim advocates the peer-oriented approach of 'conversational learning' in her homiletics classes. See Eunjo Mary Kim, 'Conversational Learning: A Feminist Pedagogy for Teaching Preaching', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 5 (2002). Important but by no means the only texts for opening up learning in ways that free women to respond and participate include Ella Pearson Mitchell, *Women, to Preach or Not to Preach: 21 Outstanding Black Preachers Say Yes!* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1991), Carol Marie Noren, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), Susan Durber and Heather Walton, *Silence in Heaven: A Book of Women's Preaching* (London: SCM Press, 1994), Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education*, 1st edn (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), Lee McGee and Thomas H. Troeger, *Wrestling with the Patriarchs: Retrieving Women's Voices in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), Susan Durber, *Preaching Like a Woman* (London: SPCK, 2007), and Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). The issue is not entirely missed by male writers, and recommendations for conversational and egalitarian ways of approaching sermon preparation and

## **Conclusion**

The limitations encountered in applying the concept of communities of practice to the development of preachers resulted in a change of emphasis in the research. This caused me to broaden my view of what constitutes situated learning and to consider other theories addressing the social nature of learning, in particular the nature of mentoring and the possibility of learning from and with peers. The three institutional schemes for supervisory mentoring that have been discussed are not exhaustive of the range of relationships that trainee preachers can have with more experienced guides and counsellors. They are included here to raise the typical issues that affect any formal or informal arrangement made by an institution to develop the gifts, ministries and callings.

In my three field studies I will be looking for signs of situated learning and for the existence of formative experiences of communities of practice. I will examine the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of supervision and mentoring from the point of view of the minister or pastor learning to preach, as well as the effect of peers on one another learning to preach. My thesis is about discovering the extent to which these can be discerned in the educational trajectory or progress of a range of different preachers, and then to see how much modern educational theory could contribute to the shaping of preachers. I am therefore asking in the field studies whether there can be sufficient influence on a preacher from past and present preachers, sufficient influence from and on present listeners, and sufficient influence on future preachers to justify recognition of these forces as highly significant socially-mediated forms of learning that contribute to a preacher's development. If so, this will justify advancing a theory of a community of agreed sermonic enterprises, some of its theological and pastoral implications, and finally a range of principles and recommendations for good practice, which I will do in my concluding chapters 9 and 10. Before considering these field studies, I will in the next chapter introduce the studies and the methodologies involved.

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delivery are to be found in McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, and Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*

## **Chapter 5**

### **Empirical Research Methodologies**

The theoretical explorations I have made in the last three chapters will form the conceptual basis for the empirical work of the next three chapters. These chapters present and examine field studies of preachers in a variety of settings and using a range of investigative methods. My strategy in using two analytical methods and three data sources was to conduct a loose form of data triangulation in which employing multiple methods can increase clarity. This was not a strict form of triangulation, as I did not judge that data from the different methods would allow stringent cross-checking.<sup>1</sup> The use of multiple methods *did* allow different yet complementary questions to be asked, and enabled the results of the qualitative research to act as a source of hypotheses.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I introduce each of the three studies and give an overview of the research methods employed. I also discuss how participants and source material were chosen and the strengths and limitations for my thesis of these methods, and of the demand characteristics of the data, and I confirm my observation of College and University Research Ethics guidelines. These descriptions of my methodologies are supplemented by documents in the Appendices.

#### ***Field Study 1: Church of Scotland ministers***

My first field study used an on-line questionnaire to elicit responses from serving Church of Scotland ministers, and my analysis of that data forms the substance of chapter 6.

#### **Survey design and rationale**

The purpose of this field study was to determine experience of, and attitudes and intentions towards preaching and learning to preach held by serving, ordained ministers in the Church of Scotland. This was to be achieved through a questionnaire containing primarily Likert Scale questions measuring degrees of agreement / disagreement with a series of statements.

At the very beginning of this research project, I devised a survey to determine experiences of and attitudes to learning preaching of students in a homiletics class

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<sup>1</sup> Triangulation is defined and considered in Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, 2nd edn (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002), p. 371.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

that I was co-teaching.<sup>3</sup> The resultant data were interesting, but I decided not to incorporate them into the research, for reasons that I will shortly make clear. The students were invited to complete a questionnaire during class at the beginning of the course, and a sequel to this was requested of them at the end of the course. Thus I reasoned that I would have the beginnings of a small longitudinal study with the potential to analyse changes in learning attitudes over time. I also distributed the first part of the same questionnaire to some other students I was teaching for a Church of England diocese in January 2006, paving the way, I hoped, for some comparisons across denominational practice. I realised that because I was teaching on these courses there were both ethical issues and research issues to consider. Ethically, the chief concern was that no student's education could be affected negatively by their responses to the questionnaire.<sup>4</sup> To ensure this, full anonymity was preserved through the process.<sup>5</sup>

The research issue that arose was more difficult for the project. Because I was contributing teaching to the course, and had exposure to the class, I considered upon reflection that the data would be contaminated by a possible respondent bias. For example, some questions that asked the respondent to prioritise their learning goals at the end of the course, for instance, could have been affected by their knowledge of what I as a teacher would like to see. This is sometimes referred to as the 'good bunny' or 'good subject' syndrome.<sup>6</sup> This was the principal reason that these data were not used for this research project. Another reason not to use the data derived from the fact that the pool of respondents (n=16) who could be compared was quite small for quantitative data analysis. The main reason for not using this data was that I thought I could produce a better and much larger surveying project, using a refinement of the questionnaire and to be sent out to recently ordained ministers in the Church of Scotland. This pilot exercise provided valuable experience in questionnaire design, and raised important methodological issues for my thought in advance of the main study.

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<sup>3</sup> Homiletics [3/4] taught in New College, University of Edinburgh, Semester 1, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The assurances given to the students may be found at the head of the sample of the questionnaire used, see Appendix 2.3.

<sup>5</sup> In order to match the follow-up questionnaire to the initial questionnaire, the students were asked to mark each questionnaire paper with a code known only to them.

<sup>6</sup> Robson, *Real World Research*, p. 172.

The final version of the survey for this field study also had the benefit of a pilot survey in September 2007.<sup>7</sup> After the final version was prepared, an invitation to take part in an online survey was sent in November 2007 by email to 409 Church of Scotland ministers. For this I had the kind assistance of the Church of Scotland Ministries Council, who offered to send the invitation to those serving ministers who could be contacted by email. This invitation was followed by a reminder email two weeks later.<sup>8</sup>

The total number of unique replies processed was 180, which represents a respectable response rate of 44%.<sup>9</sup> I will consider in chapter 6 how much this may be valued as a completely unbiased subset on the basis of some of the demand characteristics.

The question may be raised about the representative quality of a subset of ministers who were contactable by email and the implications of ignoring those who did not use that technology. In that respect there was a degree of uncertainty outside of my control introduced into my research when I discovered that out of 982 serving ministers, only 409 had been emailed with my invitation by the Ministries Council. Since I had previously been told that over 90% of present ministers had access to emails, I was surprised. I was also concerned that missing out the rest of the ministers would result in an under-representation in the sample of older ministers (and some technophobes) who were not on email. Since I considered that I was constrained by the support that could reasonably be expected from 121 George Street, the Administrative headquarters of the Church of Scotland, I decided I could not follow this up. Sending out a paper questionnaire would have been too costly,

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<sup>7</sup> In order to test the instrument, I sent an initial pilot of the survey to sixteen preachers known personally to me and who were not in the Church of Scotland. Their responses in the survey, the length of time taken to complete it, and constructive comments on the experience of taking the survey helped me to refine the instrument. The final questionnaire in November was also piloted in the Church of Scotland in October 2007 by emailing 50 ministers selected by the Church of Scotland Ministries Council. This group was also included in the invitation to participate in the final survey, although they were asked not to complete the questionnaire if they had already done so. There were no significant changes made to the form of the questionnaire as a result of receiving the October 2007 'pilot' replies, and therefore I judged that I could combine the data with the data from the main survey.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 2.1 for sample wording of invitation to participate, and Appendix 2.5 for a copy of the paper version of the survey. In my negotiations with the Ministries Council, I offered to include questions to aid their planning in provision of ministerial training in preaching. Details of these questions and ethical issues arising are discussed in Appendix 2.6.

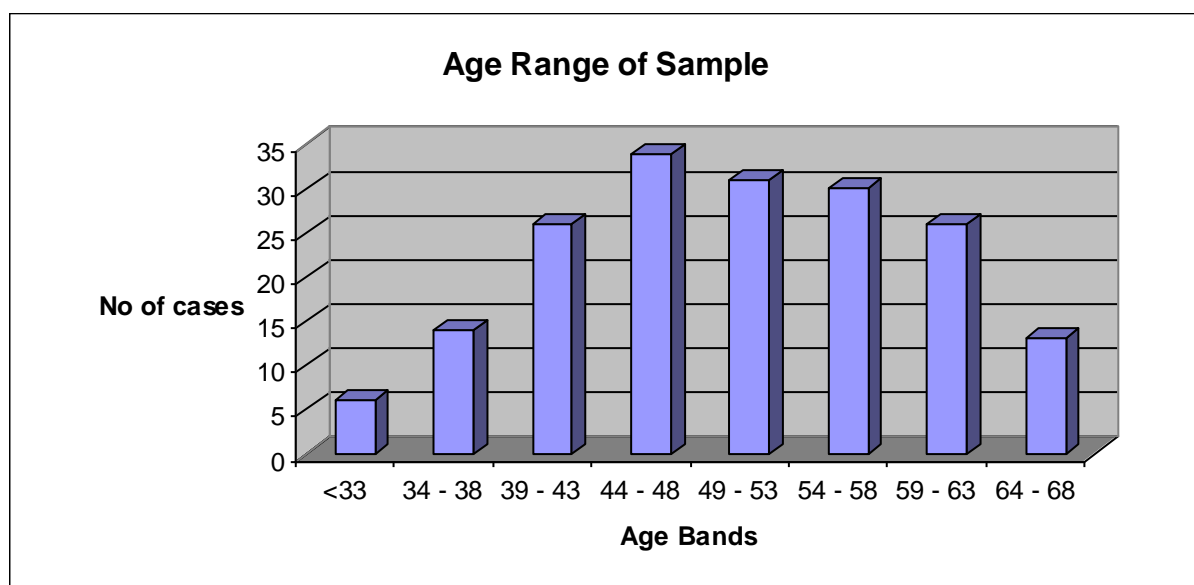
<sup>9</sup> After careful sifting of the responses for duplicates, which included examining the IP addresses of the online computer used by each respondent, as well as removing responses that were substantially incomplete, the final survey responses (n= 153) were added to the pilot responses (n=27) for the total (n= 180).

and I had not been offered access to ministers' addresses that would enable me to extend the survey in this way.

The survey was hosted online by Survey Monkey,<sup>10</sup> and responses were downloaded and imported into the statistical analysis software programme, *SPSS for Windows*, version 14. Please refer to Appendix 2.6 – Methodological Notes, for further considerations regarding the pilot surveys, sampling, representation and demand characteristics.

### Composition of the sample by age, experience and gender

The age of the respondents varied from 28 to 68. This constituted a body of relatively mature men and women, with fewer than 6% under the age of 34. Fig. 5-1 illustrates the age distribution of the respondents. The great majority (82%) of respondents fall into five age bands from ages 39 to 63. This range and distribution indicates a useful degree of conformity in the sample to the population of Cof S ministers at large. The mean age of the sample was 50, and this compares well, considering my concerns expressed above about the subset having access to emails, with the average age of C of S ministers which was 53.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 5-1**

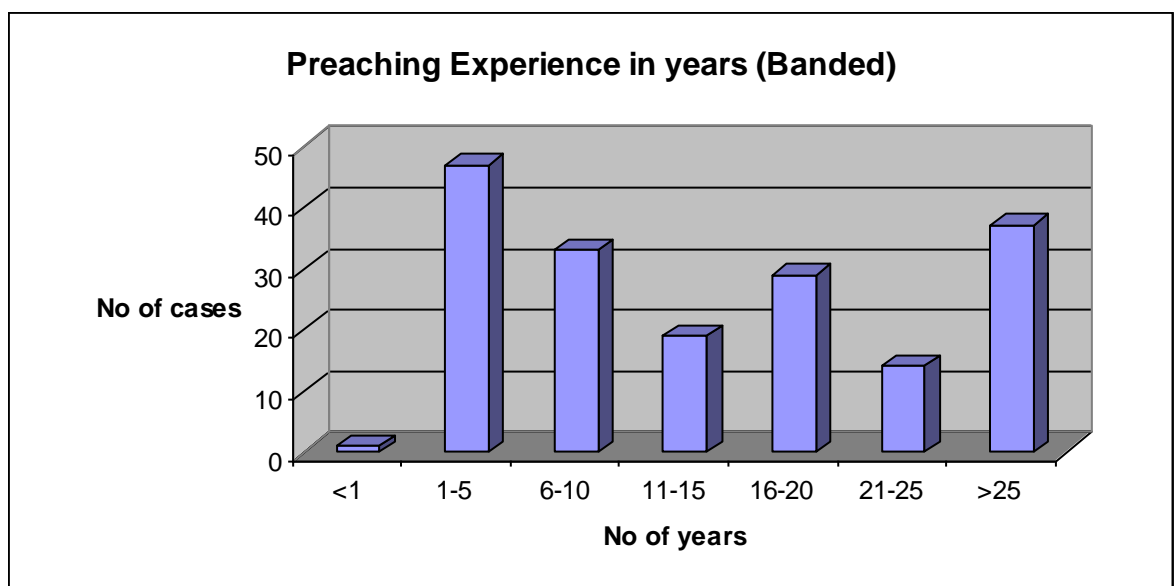
<sup>10</sup> An online survey provider <[www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)> [Accessed 12/02/09]. See Appendix 2.4 for a description of Survey Monkey and the advantages and disadvantages I found in using an online survey.

<sup>11</sup> As confirmed in an email from Ministries Council 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

For this research I decided *not* to study the significance of age for the learning experience. For example, one question that could be asked is whether older candidates for the ministry learned preaching differently from the ways younger candidates learned. Although it was possible to filter the respondents by both age and experience of different forms of learning during and since ordination, the resultant sample groups would be quite small, and this I felt would weaken inferences and conclusions based on them. Furthermore, since the term “adult education” as I have previously discussed it is rarely subject to studies of educational differences between older and younger adults, and particularly given the narrow age range of most of this group of preachers (82% were between the ages of 40 and 64), I decided not to attempt to distinguish between the cases according to, nor correlate factors with, the variable ‘age’.

I believed that a more significant variable would be experience, and this was operationally defined as the length of time since the respondent had started preaching as an ordained minister.

Figure 5-2 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their stated preaching experience, expressed in the number of years they have been preaching since they were ordained.



**Figure 5-2**

The **median** length of experience of the respondents is in fact 14 years. I decided that this was a useful dividing line for concentrating on those more recently ordained, and for comparing the learning experiences of the less experienced preachers.

Accordingly, the population size for most of my investigations of those preaching for 14 years or less is 90 cases, unless otherwise indicated (or further broken down by e.g. gender or other factors).

What differences did I expect, and more importantly, why should I concentrate on those more recently ordained? Firstly, I wished to recognise the limitation of memory. Invariably, the longer the time interval, the greater the difficulties people have identifying formative influences in their early learning experiences. As a friend completing the pilot survey for me pointed out:

... I found it hard to separate these influences (and they were quite long ago). I would have found it more helpful to know what the 'agenda' of the survey was so I could contribute in a more informed way.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, institutional structures for training in preaching have changed in many ways over the 40 years since the ordination of some of the respondents.<sup>13</sup> I decided that descriptions of educational practice going back that far might not reliably be compared with others' impressions of more recent and often different practices.

An acknowledgement of limitations such as this in the research method should be made, even with respondents more recently trained, but I did not hold that this fatally compromised the method. One way of gauging the reactions of respondents to the experience of participating in the survey, particularly in multiple-choice questionnaires used for quantitative analysis, is to provide optional questions allowing the write-in of independent answers. This can provide a useful "feeling of agency" and this in turn can slightly improve the response rate. Another benefit of occasional write-in answers is that if there were a great number of such answers this could indicate that the respondents were in some ways dissatisfied or felt constrained by the categories offered for their multiple-choice response, and therefore that the theoretical constructs were not matching the respondents' experience and thinking. Another interpretation of a large number of independent answers may indicate, alternatively, a high degree of intellectual or emotional engagement with the topics. In that respect this survey's write-in answers indicated that the respondents were exhibiting a high level of reflective thinking about preaching, and even an enthusiasm for contributing to this research. Such a conclusion is not as robust,

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<sup>12</sup> Rev. Duncan MacLaren in a written response on the experience of completing the survey.

<sup>13</sup> To give one example, Lamdin and Tilley, on the kind of support in reflection on ministerial practice that new ministers receive, wrote: "Teaching incumbents the skills for aiding reflection has been... a relatively recent development in the preparation and training of incumbents for the arrival of a junior colleague." (Lamdin and Tilley, *Supporting New Ministers*, p. 67.)



however, as conclusions derived from the data when comparing and correlating results, and is not a contributory factor to the conclusions and inferences drawn.

## Gender distribution

The gender split of the entire sample was 26% Female to 74% Male. This compares with a gender ratio of the whole of the population of serving Church of Scotland ministers (982 in November 2007) which is 20% female to 80% male.<sup>14</sup> For the section of the sample ordained less than 15 years ago (n=90), this ratio was 38% female to 62% male. There are no figures available from the Church of Scotland for gender ratio broken down by age bands. I am reasonably confident that the sample gender distribution between those more recently ordained is representative of the population of ministers surveyed, given a denomination which first allowed the ordination of women as ministers in 1968.

Figure 5-3 shows the distribution of preaching experience bands compared by gender.



Figure 5-3

By using the part of the sample more recently ordained, with less than 15 years' preaching experience, I gained a somewhat more equal gender balance, and thus ensured that the genders had more equal representation as I looked for background variations of attitude and experience across the whole data set irrespective of gender.

<sup>14</sup> As given in an email from Ministries Council 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

## Initial data analysis

To begin my investigations I analysed the raw data to identify any apparently aberrant or outlying items. One of my first observations was that there were an increasing number of missing answers further into the survey. There are two explanations that are most likely. One is a natural weariness that can take over when completing a survey, and the effect on some of being interrupted or called away. Since submitting an incomplete survey online involved no more than a few mouse clicks, it would seem that this tendency among respondents could be responsible for incomplete questionnaires. A second explanation is that in the later questions a more difficult self-reflection is being called for, and this might lead to a tendency to submit the completed part of the survey rather than push through to the end. The number of cases used for correlations in the subsequent analysis will therefore vary depending on whether or not a given question was answered, and this is noted where it is thought to be significant.

Basic frequency analysis revealed that almost all (99%) from this sample preach at least weekly, and just under half (46%) preach more than once per week. When asked for the average length of sermons preached, 8% said they preached under 12 minutes, 64% between 12 and 20 minutes, 26% over 20 minutes, and 1% (2 cases) stated that their sermons were usually over 40 minutes. I discuss in chapter 6 implications arising from the possibility that the sample has been biased by containing an unrepresentative number of those ministers who are emotionally more committed to preaching than some of their colleagues. Initial frequency analysis of the survey also revealed very high numbers reporting on the significance and value of mentoring & feedback. This alerted me to the importance of this issue, and therefore influenced to some degree the kind of subsequent data analysis that I carried out, and indeed the emphasis given to this area in the theoretical chapters.

As this survey and field study were planned early in my research, I found later, perhaps inevitably, that there were missing questions and undeveloped areas for study, such as the collegial nature of learning preaching and the role of congregations in the feedback on sermons. Had there been sufficient resources, a study of one or more local congregations and their reception of sermons could have been a fruitful line of enquiry. As it is, this first field study served in many ways to hone my methodology in preparation for the questions I would ask of the data gathered for the second and third field studies.

The analysis of these data and implications for this thesis are presented in chapter 6.

## ***Field Study 2: Preachers' autobiographical essays***

For my second field study I have undertaken a qualitative analysis of autobiographical essays on preaching, and this is presented in chapter 7. These had been written by a group of fifteen UK preachers for a book that I compiled and edited in 2004-2005 entitled *Pulpit Journeys*.<sup>15</sup> I conceived this book before this research commenced, having been commissioned by publishers to do it early in 2004. The writers were not conscious that their writing would be used in this way. I was not as editor seeking a fully representative population sample of British preachers. So in retrospect we can see this as a serendipitous sample, and in terms of the characteristics of the data sets for this field study, I have used non-probability sampling, for the contributors were 'found' or 'accidental' rather than arranged or collected for research purposes.<sup>16</sup> The gender balance of the sample is unequal, with 13 male writers and only 2 female writers. Although I was of course responsible for choosing the contributors to the original book, as I describe below, and in retrospect would have preferred to have had more women writers, I did not find it at all easy at the time to find an equal number of preachers who had the public stature and the experience desired by the publisher. For the present research this gender imbalance is the more regrettable, but will have to be compensated by more proportionate representation in the other two field studies,

As a survey sample, these preachers inhabit a comparatively wide theological spectrum within confessional, Protestant, Reformed Christianity. As a sample they also shared features such as availability when asked and a willingness to write for the book. They were drawn from a pool of thirty or so preachers invited to write and whom I knew of or who had been suggested for the book. Most were paid a small honorarium for their work, except the two who preferred to be interviewed, and one writer who declined payment. Payments were made directly to them by the publishers. In the course of this research I revisited the contributors to ask for permission for their work to be used. None withheld permission. All contributors' identities have been hidden where not expressly permitted by the contributor, along with the identities of any colleagues or peers referred to in the interviews. The authors' permissions were also obtained for any substantial quotation in this research.

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<sup>15</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*.

<sup>16</sup> Probability and non-probability sampling is discussed in Robson, *Real World Research*, pp. 261-266.

## Demand characteristics

Before exploring the analysis of the material, it is worth briefly considering any factors that might be supposed to contribute to the constraints felt by the writers as they shaped their responses. The invitation to contribute to the volume of essays included the following paragraph:

I am writing to invite you to contribute to a book ... on the theme of the formative influences on their development as preachers.... You would have a completely free hand in how to approach this, focussing on any particular aspect as seems inspiring to you. This might be the most influential preacher or teacher you had, how you learned to discern God's word for your sermons, the kind of illustrations you use and how you find new ones, a story of a particular moment of revelation about the preaching task... the emphasis is on your growth or journey as a preacher, and on what you could share from that experience that would help others coming along.<sup>17</sup>

From the brief suggestions here of aspects of their preaching development that writers were invited to focus on, only the idea of “influential preacher or teacher” appears to have been taken up by the contributors in a significant way. As will be seen, stories of role models and mentors considerably outweigh these writers’ accounts of any other influences. This may have been influenced by the invitation, although a complete explanation of demand characteristics along those lines would have to account for the fact that none of the other suggestions were directly taken up by any of the writers.

Potential contributors also received a follow-up letter which contained the following paragraph:

Autobiographical in nature, the essay should focus, we feel, on stories, events, influential individuals, and /or moments of revelation about the preaching ministry. Other qualities I am looking for are anecdote and a lightness of touch, rather than it being didactic and, well... preachy ... it needs to be story-based, as far as possible.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth noting that these instructions may have to a degree superseded the guidance given in the first letter. My aim was to allow their freedom, creativity and autonomy as writers, even while I was encouraging them to share accounts from personal experience presented entertainingly and as narrative.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 3.2.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 3.3.

Another demand characteristic resides in the fact that the writers, who were almost all experienced communicators in print as well as in oral form, will have been conscious that they were writing for publication, and most probably for a particular kind of reader. The reputation of the publisher, Darton Longman and Todd would very likely lead them to suppose that the likely readership of the book would have a high level of Christian commitment along with a high degree of educational attainment. The readership would probably also have an interest in preaching, in the personality and personal stories of preachers, and in the craft of preaching. Most probably the authors supposed, as did my commissioning editor and I, that the readership would largely be composed of preachers and ministers, who were either experienced, in training or considering their call. With a couple of exceptions the aim of the writers does not seem for the most part to have been to ‘preach’, that is to say, to write with a preacher’s rhetoric and intention.<sup>19</sup> They have not made apologetic arguments or evangelistic appeals. Neither have they apparently sought to make a scholarly contribution to the field of homiletics. Instead they appear to have been trying to fulfil the editorial commission to write about their own experiences and beliefs about preaching in a way that would instruct and educate the reader who is interested in preaching. I would argue that this is no more likely to introduce a bias than the good subject effect referred to earlier.

Two of the writers were interviewed orally by me, and their responses to my questions were transcribed verbatim. Their exact words form the substance of the book chapters, although not all their words were used, as pauses and conversational digressions along with some sensitive or personal material were removed before submitting for publication.<sup>20</sup>

The written material was lightly edited for publication for felicity of style by me and by the publisher’s copy editor. It should be noted that some minor differences existed between these collected chapters as they were submitted to the publisher and the published version due to further copy editing, but I judged that there were none that materially affected the data from the point of view of this research. I had also removed or reduced passages that focussed too narrowly on the writer’s theory of preaching at the expense of the writer’s own story and development. In this I was not

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<sup>19</sup> Although forgiveable. They are preachers, after all.

<sup>20</sup> It should also be noted that the interview questions appearing in the text of the book were not the exact questions asked of them by the interviewer, but that every effort was made to represent accurately and responsibly in the printed ‘questions’ the subject area that the contributor was addressing in his response, and to avoid mis-quoting the speaker.

so much trying to separate what they had learned from how they had learned it, but I believed with my commissioning editor that narrative would make a more interesting, entertaining and readable book.

Again, a research issue arises here about the involvement of the researcher in the data collection process, and I must acknowledge that I had significant involvement in producing the material that subsequently became data for this study. This may be thought to ‘contaminate’ the data to a degree not normally seen in this kind of research. Against this it may be argued that this material, now in the public domain, represents a valuable ‘found’ research source.<sup>21</sup> As an editor I was looking to tell a story with a range of different voices, and it may be argued that this is analogous to the way as a researcher I would choose my participants.

There are also of course the limitations of memory. In contrast to the data set in the Church of Scotland ministers study, none of these writers had been preaching for less than 15 years, and in some cases the experiences and past attitudes and influences were being recalled from 30 to 40 years previously. To gauge how self-conceptions might have changed over time or how they might have been influenced by more recent events would require a longitudinal study, carried out over many years, and this was not feasible. The significance of early influences, people and events in all our lives remains subjective and often irretrievable.

In defence of this research method, the theories I am working with were being tested for their phenomenological validity over a data set. Thus for example one recollection of the inspiration given by the experience of listening to preaching at an early age, is not significant, but 6, 8 or 10 such recollections are more likely to indicate a common pattern. In particular, given the free hand and autonomy of the thirteen writers,<sup>22</sup> the relative frequency of mention in the discourse of various topics has been taken to indicate a valuing and privileging of certain formative influences over others.

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<sup>21</sup> For example the fifteen preachers writing for Edward England, ed., *My Call to Preach* (Crowborough East Sussex: Highland Books, 1986). These testimonies were not used for this research principally, as with the Church of Scotland field study, to allow the focus to be on the experience of younger, late twentieth-century preachers.

<sup>22</sup> The two interview subjects, responding in a fairly free and discursive way to a series of open-ended questions, may be seen to have had slightly less autonomy in their contribution to the publication.

## **Process**

I imported each preacher's edited contribution as a text document into NVivo7 textual analysis and indexing software.<sup>23</sup> In my content analysis I was chiefly seeking to identify similarities and background variations in a phenomenological analysis of learning to preach. In order to analyse the discourse, answers were coded and indexed, allowing a composite picture to be built up of the responses and positions of the writers. I present the findings of my analysis in chapter 7.

### ***Field Study 3: Methodist preachers in Liverpool***

#### **Method and contributors**

The third field study is ethnographic research involving the qualitative analysis of a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The sample was a group of twelve Methodists who began their preaching ministry, or who were actively considering a preaching vocation, during the time they were members of, or closely associated with Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church, Liverpool in the period from 1991 to 1996. The minister and university chaplain at the time, Rev. Dr David Wilkinson also volunteered to be interviewed. In my content analysis I am chiefly seeking to identify variations and similarities in learning to preach by comparing present self-understanding of important values with

- a) the preachers' recollections of the values that were dominant or current at the time of sharing what was evidently a 'community of practice' some years previously
- b) the understanding of preaching held by the minister at the time
- c) theoretical models and conceptions of adult learning.

#### **The analytical method used and its limitations**

The interview transcripts have been analysed as discourse in an interpretative way to discern the emergence of common themes, conceptual and experiential correlations and background variations among those sharing attributes as preachers in the Methodist Church. This incorporates more of a realist, as opposed to positivist approach, as it involved an iterative process, moving from the literature on learning to the data, looking for reflections and resonances, as well as moving from the data to the literature, looking for theories that could be mapped onto the responses. This

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<sup>23</sup> NVivo 7 is a programme for analysing qualitative data, distributed by QSR International. It works by allowing imported text to be coded by user-defined categories. This allows evidence of words, subjects and topics in the discourse to be assembled and interrogated from a large amount of material.

dialectic moves towards the ‘grounded theorising’ of Glaser and Strauss using what they call the ‘constant comparative method,’ but it is not strictly inductive.<sup>24</sup> The explanatory logic is primarily one of developing and tracing ideas alongside inductive theorising, but without attempting to compare, evaluate or predict at early stages in the analysis.<sup>25</sup>

Why might I want to use qualitative, semi-structured interviewing, rather than a structured form of interviewing, or a questionnaire? Naturally, questions asked of a respondent in a semi-structured interview are always leading questions to some degree, although of course less so than in a fully structured interview or questionnaire. My participants were asked to respond to questions which demanded a high level of interpretation of their own experience, occasionally in categories or schema which they were not used to using. What I was trying to uncover was the preacher’s knowledge and reflexive understanding, and that depends to a great extent on their existing epistemological framework and their stances towards their own learning rather than those of the interviewer. The interaction of the interview process is both a legitimate and a generative activity that attempts to respect these frameworks.

There were in addition the limitations of memory, since in some cases the experiences and past attitudes and influences were being recalled from up to 15 years previously. There is no practical way of testing when interpretations were evolved from early experiences, or even whether some understandings were entirely *ex post facto* and the result of later learning or even suggestion by the interviewer. This may be recognised as a potential weakness in the research method from a positivist point of view, and this is one reason for conducting three field studies in this research project.

Finally, there is an inbuilt limitation in this method that the interviewee’s views and interpretations are only *partially* accessible through a semi-structured interview. Other methods would have been to study a piece or pieces of writing, such as a comparison of recent and early sermons, or to solicit third party observational accounts of how the contributor operates in practice, and to analyse these for behavioural insights. There are practical and epistemological difficulties however with both these approaches.

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<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London: SAGE, 1996), p. 147, citing B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



Epistemologically, therefore, I do not claim that my facts are in any strict sense objective or that they in fact exist apart from the process of generating the data. The data not only require interpretation to discern patterns and causal mechanisms, but in fundamental ways they have also been generated by my involvement in the investigation. In social science terms they have been in that respect contaminated, and I am implicated. On this strongly ‘interpretivist’ view, my questions carried with them a whole set of assumptions and conceptual frameworks that, though they are in most cases easily shared by the interviewees, dictate the kind of answers given.<sup>26</sup> Another position is that it may be, according to Jennifer Mason, “inappropriate to see social interaction as ‘bias’ which can potentially be eradicated.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore I do not believe that my involvement as interviewer invalidates the research findings, for I have tried to differentiate in my analysis between where data have been used illustratively and where they have been used constitutively.<sup>28</sup> This depends in turn upon the data sample’s representative quality, which I discuss below.

### **Justification of the data set**

Here I will discuss how this survey came about and in particular why these participants were chosen. In conversation with my then colleague David Wilkinson,<sup>29</sup> I learned there was a Methodist church of which he had been minister, and at which over a short period of time there had been an unusually high number of people offering themselves for preaching training and/or as candidates for the Methodist ministry. I decided to interview him, in order to lay the groundwork for potential survey of some of these people if they could still be traced. In the interview he described the context and kind of preaching community that was in various ways influencing the students and other young people who were attending the church or involved in the associated Methodist chaplaincy at Liverpool University at that time. Over a very few years a dozen or more people from one church were either starting to preach, actively considering preaching ministries, or preparing for leadership that involved preaching. These numbers were far more typical of an entire circuit of churches rather than one church on its own. Moreover the age of those offering themselves for preaching and leading worship was considerably lower than the average age of local preachers, as several of the interview participants pointed out.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> Dr Wilkinson was Associate Director at the Centre for Christian Communication, as well as Fellow in Christian Apologetics at St John’s College, Durham from 1999 – 2004.

This remarkable development was also reported in a large article in the British weekly church press at that time.<sup>30</sup>

The fact of this unusual level of vocational aspiration may be grounds for criticism of the research that this is not a representative sample of the larger population of all those who train as preachers in the Methodist Church. Might it be that I have in fact used “extreme case samples” for this part of my research?<sup>31</sup> To a certain extent this is true. Most were in their twenties at the time of their calling, whereas the average age of Local Preachers was and still is much, much higher. In most other respects it is not possible to determine how representative these individuals may be of a larger pool of people who are actively developing their gifts or pursuing a preaching ministry.

Certainly there is reason to be suspicious of the possible ways in which several individuals’ vocation or sense of calling may have contributed to and been influenced by a peer group enthusiasm. They may also be influenced by discourse that implicitly or even explicitly privileged the ‘up-front’ minister and made that position worthy of emulation or aspiration. Wilkinson and others in leadership at the time were aware of this. In interview he said:

One of the things that we often try to resist was that preaching was the only form of ministry that these young people could get involved in... So we were probably harder with some people in terms of their call than other churches would have been.<sup>32</sup>

This does not completely ameliorate the problem, which can mean that the results drawn from studying such a group are not generalisable, that is, applicable to a larger group.

In response I would argue that what I am studying has elements of a ‘flower hothouse’ for the evident atmosphere of spiritual fervour that produced this disproportionate amount of individuals hearing or testing a call to preach. A hothouse culture can produce accelerated growth in plants and therefore there are benefits to the scientist studying growth factors, chiefly in the magnification of items more difficult to discern ‘in the wild’. Similarly in this study I have sought to identify formative factors in these preachers’ developmental trajectories – factors that can be seen ‘in the wild’ but usually less dramatically and far less easily analysed. These factors will of course be located in the other two field studies in the thesis. I believe

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<sup>30</sup> As told to me by Dr Wilkinson and other participants interviewed for this research.

<sup>31</sup> As discussed in Robson, *Real World Research*, p. 266.

<sup>32</sup> David Wilkinson subject interview 19<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

that the advantages to this approach outweigh the potential ‘non-repeatability’ of the data.

In conclusion, this data set has an opportunistic aspect of its inclusion in this research, but it was chosen particularly for the potential it promised to identify features common to learning in communities of practice and through legitimate peripheral participation.

### **Categories of reflective learning analysed in the discourse**

As has been discussed, the interview process is capable of generating data, but not without considerable and inextricable involvement of the interviewer. The questions asked of the participants, the topics raised, and the language used to raise those topics are all responsible not only for direction of the interview but also for the kind of discourse that is then being used as data. This is a feature of semi-structured interviewing, but need not compromise the research, as I have argued earlier in this chapter. A schedule of questions for the interviews may be found in Appendix 4.4.

For qualitative analysis I used NVivo textual analysis software, as employed for the second field study. The main categories for coding the interview material were as follows: ‘peer group influence’ refers to the effect of others who were at a similar level in their development as preachers or ministers, especially in areas of encouragement, practical help, competition and contribution to the vocational certainty and early learning. A separate but related category was the effect of ‘peers as models for learning,’ although as will be seen this figured far less often. The second major area participants talked about was the effect of a role model or role models, as discussed in chapter 3. A sub-category to role models in my research, and an attempt to analyse this with a separate coding variable, is the effect of ‘practice models.’ This refers to possible influence on the particular ways in which the respondent preaches and prepares and delivers a sermon based on their observation of others, regardless of whether those others were mentors, peers, or admired from afar.

The fourth category of analysis was ‘mentoring’, referring to specific relationships of coaching, usually accompanied by a formal or informal arrangement to give from a position of greater experience and authority advice, instruction, and formative evaluation to the student. Again, this draws on the theoretical discussion, and to an extent informed the discussion on mentors in chapter 4. Mentoring in practice seems to almost always include feedback on performance, but ‘feedback’ was the subject of

separate coding for analysis. Evidence of ‘self-reflection on learning and practice’ was indexed, although it should be noted that I never asked a direct question about the participants’ disposition or ability to analyse their own practice. Instead self-reflection was identified in discourse displaying this quality of an analysis of past practice and the practice-reflection learning cycle as discussed in the section on Experiential Learning in chapter 2. ‘Sermon understanding,’ where the subject talks about what they believe to be the aim, content or theology of preaching, was the final major area of indexing for content analysis.

There were minor areas of discourse that were smaller when measured by volume but still contained and indicated significant topics or trends. These areas included: ‘learning process,’ where the interviewee gives a good description of formative or developmental factors; ‘formal instruction,’ including courses, conferences; and as a sub-section to the latter, ‘reading books on homiletics.’ A hugely important aspect of learning, ‘learning through practice,’ was hardly ever directly talked about, but I believe that may be precisely because it was tacitly assumed by participants as well as by me when conducting the interviews as being too obvious to mention compared with the more subtle learning influences I was investigating.

Neither was the concept of a ‘community of practice’ as defined and discussed in chapter 4 explicitly named or discussed as such by either interviewer or participants. I reasoned that discourse about the existence of such communities could be discerned from other ways of talking about it, and therefore community of practice was indexed where an interpretation of the answer could be argued as indicating a dynamic that matched the community of practice theory.<sup>33</sup>

It became apparent during the interviews that the effect of models according to their gender was important for some of the women interviewees, along with the perceived relevance of the theological position of a role model or mentor. Although these are significant areas worthy of research, the data collected in this field study do not bear a great deal of analysis, and the subject will have to await the attention of another research project.

## **Research ethics**

In line with the research ethics guidelines and agreements for this project, the identities of all contributors (with the exception of Dr Wilkinson, who has given his permission explicitly) have been hidden where not expressly permitted by the

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<sup>33</sup> Or as a cluster of related ideas as it appears in ch. 4.

contributor, along with the identities of any colleagues or peers referred to in the interviews.<sup>34</sup> See Appendix 4.2 for a list of participants by age, gender and ministry experience.

Further details about the interview process, the schedule of questions, the Participant Explanation Form and an example of the contributors' Consent Forms may be found in the Appendices. I discuss my analysis of Field Study 3 and present my findings in chapter 8 of this thesis.

## ***Conclusion***

This overview of research methodologies concludes the theoretical chapters of my thesis and introduces the empirical work. I have argued that using two research methods and three data sets gives a form of triangulation that validates my analyses and strengthens my conclusions. This is helpful, given the possibilities of contaminating demand characteristics that might introduce flaws in the analysis of a single data set. In the next chapter I will begin my analysis and discussion of the first of the three field studies, quantitative data from a survey of Church of Scotland ministers.

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<sup>34</sup> See Appendix 1 for a copy of the New College Research Ethics Committee 'Ethics (Self) Assessment Form.'



## **Chapter 6**

### **Field Study 1: Church of Scotland Ministers**

#### ***Introduction***

In this the first of my three field studies, I explore and analyse the results of a quantitative survey of ordained ministers in the Church of Scotland, carried out in November 2007. In the questionnaire I sought to elicit answers that would point to trends in their conceptions of learning preaching. I looked for self-reflection on preachers' development in the early years of their ministry, on their training for ministry, and on the formative influences they may have had as their vocation was being developed, and even before.

In my analysis I chiefly examine the responses of ministers more recently ordained as opposed to more senior (in experience of preaching) ministers. I find some differences in approach, practice and experience between male and female ministers and this represents a significant area calling for further research. I also identify the preferences that respondents had for the educational methods commonly made available to them during and after their training for ministry. In the course of this I identify a common psychological factor that would seem to provide the kind of intrinsic motivation vital for successful and efficient adult learning, and that can be related to the theological standpoint of the preachers surveyed. I examine attitudes to role mentors and mentors, as well as to various kinds of training in preaching both experienced in the course of ordination training and as prospectively valued for future development in preaching.

#### ***Analysis***

As I have noted in earlier chapters, motivation to learn is fundamental to developing sound pedagogical / andragogical principles for adult learning. Extrinsic motivations, for example a strong need to achieve high scores in an examination, are associated with 'surface' learning while intrinsic motivations – connected with perceived immediate practical application or usefulness, with whether there is a sense of respect accorded to the learner, and with how the learning contributes to the learner's deeply held world views and sense of identity – commonly lead to or enable 'deep' learning. A theological interpretation of these factors should enable us to work with the phenomenological realities of learning without engaging in a psychological reductionism that makes theology redundant for all practical purposes. For instance, as we shall see when considering the qualitative data in chapters 7 and 8, the

vocation to preach is considered to be felt internally but to originate externally, as the minister's sense of God calling, drawing forward, or giving confidence. This, crudely expressed, is the basis for taking vocation or a call to preach as a fundamental and intrinsic incentive to learn.

Certainly there is no doubt that the respondents to this survey value the activity and ministry of preaching in their ministry.<sup>1</sup> Within the original sample (n=180) there is an extremely high degree of affirmation of preaching. This is seen as part of each respondent's personal calling and sense of significance. 89% of the sample either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

*Preaching has always formed a significant part of my vocation.*

Preaching is also affirmed in its importance in their local church and in the wider denomination they serve. When asked about the importance of preaching to the Sunday service of worship, 86.4% agreed that it was "Foundational" or "Very Important." Only 6% agreed that preaching was for them "On a par with other ministries" and there were no respondents who agreed that preaching was "Less important." (One may wish however to note that there were 14 missing responses (7.6% of total responses) for this question. A convincing interpretation of this is difficult.)

Similarly, over 97% of the respondents said that they preached either weekly (53%) or more than once per week (45%). Clearly our sample is composed of those who are professionally engaged with preaching in the most committed ways.

Amongst those more recently ordained (n=90) this is somewhat less often the case. This led me to consider whether it was possible to identify a factor that reflected the commitment of the respondent to preaching in their ministry, in order to examine this as a motivation to learning. I used a procedure in the SPSS software called Factor Analysis and ran the procedure across all of the variables. I suspected that five or six of my variables would correlate or could be connected. I wondered if, taken together, they would work as a gauge of a respondent's attitude towards preaching, or in other words, if there would exist a tendency for respondents with high scores in one variable to show similarly high scores in other variables expressing an attitude or inclination to the ministry of preaching. The Principle Component Analysis

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<sup>1</sup> In Appendix 2.6, on the methodology of this survey, I consider the significance of this high level of interest in terms of its statistical significance upon the demand characteristics of the questionnaire. The survey was titled "Learning Preaching Survey" and it must be recognised that those completing the survey may well have had a higher interest in preaching than those who declined to participate.



compares all possible correlations between all variables and identifies those variables that could contribute to such a factor. The factor analysis thus lent weight to my thesis that these are statistically important. I have termed this factor the Positive Preaching Attitude (hereafter PPA), as a result of its clear derivation from correlations between six variables from the survey. These variables were derived from questions asking agreement / disagreement on a Likert Scale with the following statements:

The ordained ministers whom I most admired were notable for their preaching.

Preaching has always formed a significant part of my vocation.

When I looked forward to ordained ministry in the church, I saw myself first and foremost as a preacher.

From Question 19 (ranking personal ministerial priorities) I identified the ranking given to:

Ministry of the Word, including preaching.

From Question 20, "Please indicate how important you believe preaching to be," I elicited the degree of importance attached to preaching:

...within the Sunday Service

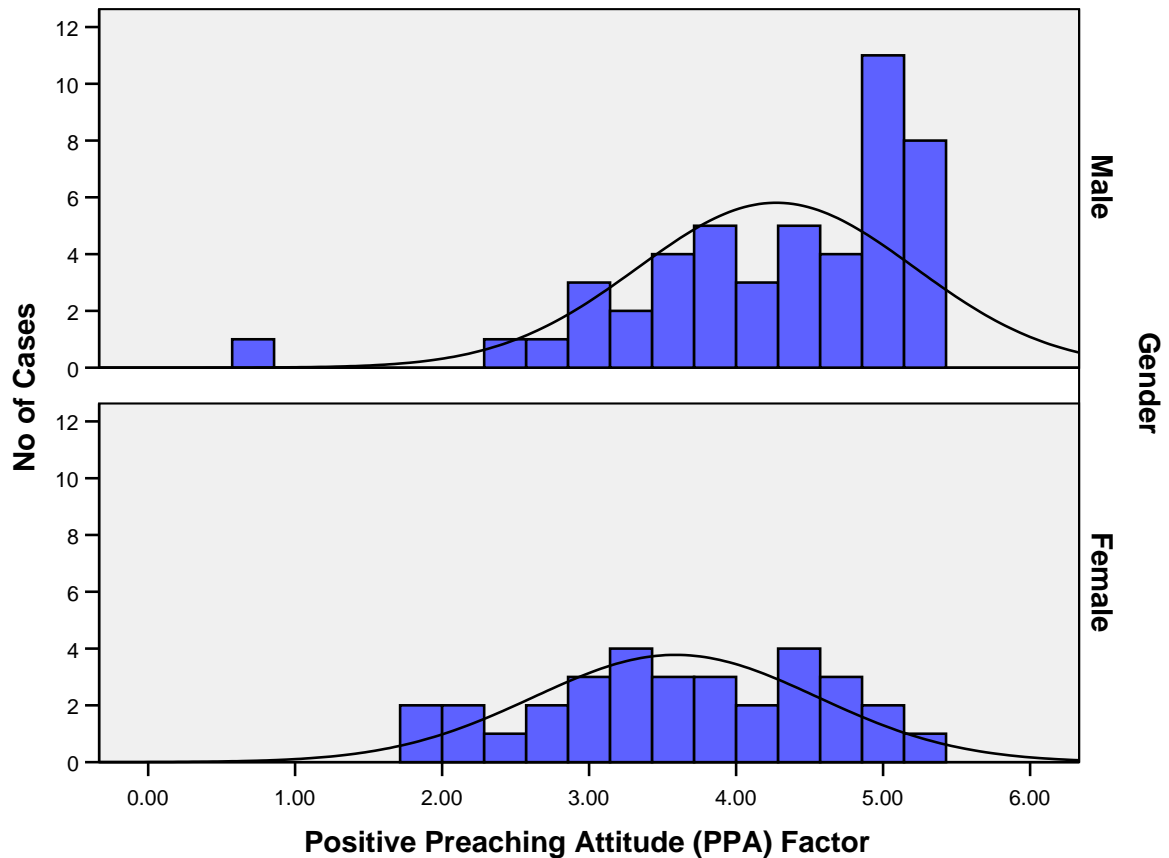
...in the totality of ministry within your church.

One additional variable, the respondent's Average Length of Sermon correlated significantly with this factor<sup>2</sup> or in other words tended to be longer in proportion to the level of PPA. As this not entirely unexpected correlation is clearly of the order of an effect rather than a cause, I have not included it in the calculations for the PPA, especially as it is likely to be skewed in some cases by local practice. Additionally, the reader should please note that I do not assume that longer preaching is better preaching. When theological standpoint and understanding of preaching is considered, length of preaching might become significant as it relates to, for instance, a view of preaching as teaching.

The distribution of this factor among the respondents may be appreciated from the diagram in Fig 6.1. These graphs show the number of cases exhibiting different levels of the PPA factor for each gender, along with a line representing a normal distribution.

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<sup>2</sup> A Pearson Correlation of .497, significant at the .01 level.



**Figure 6-1**

In these graphs we see that the PPA factor is distributed fairly normally among female respondents, but that male ministers show a higher level of the PPA factor as a group, with a greater number exhibiting an extremely high factor, and only three male respondents showing a low factor, compared with seven female respondents. If this PPA factor among the sample is instrumental in learning to preach, or can be demonstrated to correlate with ways in which respondents have learned to preach, then a significant area of further research could lie in looking at views of preaching in female ministers and the educational methods that are offered to them in preaching.

I began to use the PPA Factor as an indicator of the degree of importance attached by each respondent to preaching as a personal expression of their ministry. I sought to analyse it with respect to other educational aspects of their formation as a preacher to determine whether there were significant correlations, and whether or not it may justifiably be considered part of the preachers' motivational approaches. For instance, if there are preachers who exhibit a high level of the PPA factor who

nevertheless show no particular appreciation of or desire for active learning, it would be reasonable to conclude that such preachers see the responsibility for growing as a preacher to lie outside themselves, perhaps granted by God and/or gained through experience. To investigate this, the PPA factor was analysed with the variables representing the value placed on different forms of learning, both those in the past and prospective options for future study. Before looking at this, I will consider whether there are theological approaches to preaching that also bear on this factor.

## Metaphors for preaching

The survey attempted to identify respondents' present understandings of preaching by presenting them with a series of expanded metaphors for the ministry, deriving from my theological exploration in chapter 1.<sup>3</sup> Question 21 of the questionnaire reads:

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements / metaphors for the preacher's role or activity in the Church as they apply to your ministry.

The metaphors Expositor, Parent, Guardian, Guide, Prophet, Herald, CEO (for chief executive officer), Jester, and Teacher were presented with short explanations of what might be included in the concept.<sup>4</sup> The choices given for consideration of each metaphor were: Foundational for preaching, Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree.<sup>5</sup> The metaphors as ranked by the whole sample are presented in Table 6.1. Each metaphor is followed by a number which is the **mean** of the all the evaluations given, when "Foundational" = 5, "Disagree" = 1, and so on.

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<sup>3</sup> P. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> It was important in this, as in other lists in the questionnaire, that the order of presentation of the metaphors should not influence the respondent's consideration. To guard against this influence of the data, the options were automatically randomised in the electronic versions presented to respondents as they logged in to Survey Monkey and completed the questionnaire.

<sup>5</sup> This variation of a Likert scale was made following the pilot surveys which indicated by the distribution of the responses that degrees of disagreement were not as significant as degrees of agreement. A large proportion of the answers were positive or neutral towards all of the terms suggested.

Ranking	Metaphor	Mean
1	Educator	4.1
2	Expositor	3.6
3	Prophet	3.6
4	Herald	3.5
5	Parent	3.4
6	Guide	3.3
7	Guardian	3.1
8	CEO	2.8
9	Jester	2.7

**Table 6.1**

The ranking here is from the whole sample (n=180); the ranking produced by the more recently ordained preachers (n=90) is very similar, except that Prophet is no. 2 and Expositor is no. 3. In any case they are almost tied. Education, in the sense of helping listeners to understand and apply Christian principles, is a fairly uncontroversial view of the aim of preaching, and the metaphor Educator not only received the highest rating, but did so with the least disagreement between the cases.<sup>6</sup>

Expositor, the second most popular, was here expanded as “teaching and explaining systematically from Scripture” and thus carries with it a considerable weight of conservative evangelical theology of preaching.<sup>7</sup> At the bottom of the scale, Jester and CEO are practically outliers in this respect, but in their inclusion in this list I attempted to reflect aspects of preaching not infrequently discussed in contemporary literature of homiletics. While the mean of the responses for each these two was very low, the range of responses as indicated by the Standard Deviation figure was the greatest, indicating that they were understood and strongly affirmed by some, even while others disagreed. The only other metaphor that came close to having such a wide deviation of response was Herald.

More useful for developing understanding of how preaching is learned is to try to identify theological standpoints in our sample, and this was the chief aim of this section of the questionnaire.<sup>8</sup> Were there metaphors which were correlated, or tended to go together in some cases but not in others? If so, could a common theological

<sup>6</sup> As indicated by a low Standard Deviation of .742.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that more recently ordained preachers favoured Prophet over Expositor may be an indication of a greater concern for the church’s engagement with the structures and events of civil society. I would also suggest that this comes from a theological standpoint energised and validated less by Scripture than by other means of Christian direction such as tradition, reason, or the concerns of the laity. To establish this reliably would require further research, probably by qualitative methods.

<sup>8</sup> As I indicated in my Introduction, it is possible to locate the Herald, Guardian and Expositor metaphors on a theological spectrum. What these metaphors share homiletically is a concern with: 1) Scripture as the Word of God to his people, and expressly testifying to the person and work of Christ; 2) Christian doctrine as being teachable, desirable for orthodoxy and requiring guarding; 3) The teaching and expounding of conceptual truth, even while testifying to the living Jesus Christ.

theme or thread be discerned in the clusters? For example, did those who viewed the preacher as Herald also view her/him as a Guardian or Steward of doctrine?

In fact Herald, Guardian, Parent and Expositor clustered together very strongly.<sup>9</sup> In other words views of preaching as proclamation and the teaching of revealed, scripturally based truth coincided with “nurturing and protecting those for whom you have pastoral responsibility.” The content of the teaching has a relationship to the lives as lived, as well as the beliefs and knowledge of the listeners. It would take a further level of analysis to check that this traditional view of the minister’s pastoral responsibility was possibly being affirmed somewhat instinctively by the ministers responding to the survey, rather than giving a measure of their view that preaching should be part of this pastoral work. Taking the answer at face value would at least underline a belief that pastoral work depends on scriptural and doctrinal foundations that in turn depend on faithful preaching for a congregation to benefit.

Secondly, Educator/Teacher and Parent cluster together fairly strongly. It is easy to see how explaining and helping listeners to understand and apply Christian principles could be allied with a parental view of preaching as encouraging and correcting, nurturing and protecting. It is the practical application of the Christian faith, rooted in doctrine and concerned with how the listeners understand their faith as they work it out in their lives.

Finally, it is worth observing that a high approval of CEO and Jester<sup>10</sup> were often found in the same cases (although, as the ranking indicates, those cases favouring them were fewer). Superficially, these two metaphors do not have a clear connection as ideas. On the contrary, one thinks of the traditional Shakespearean antithesis between the King and his Fool. Here the vanities and hubris of power are challenged and punctured by the insight of the outsider, the one who has no power, but who does have permission to entertain and to jest in the courts of power. Some preachers would seem to recognise their CEO-like leadership responsibilities and the unique opportunities that preaching gives for fulfilling those responsibilities. Some of the same may also recognise the rather absolute power that the *listeners* have when it comes to hearing and receiving a message. In other words, preachers know that narrow attitudes and comfortable prejudices are not easily countered by accusatory and confrontational rhetoric. One interpretation of this finding is that there are

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<sup>9</sup> These showed Principal Component Analysis scores of .758, .725, .685 and .675, as the first component.

<sup>10</sup> CEO and Jester showed Principal Component Analysis scores (as the second component) of .715 and .718.

preachers who appreciate and would adopt the role of the jester who goads, irritates or probes in order to find a way past the resistance of a congregation.

I was surprised that there were not more correlations to be found between the metaphors of Parent and Guide / Witness, since I had expected that many younger ministers who viewed preaching as a form of nurturing and protecting would also relate to the metaphor of guiding as a shepherd guides a flock. A closer examination of the way the question was presented, however, indicates to me that there were too many potentially quite different understandings of parenting incorporated in the explanation. Not only nurturing and protecting, but also correcting and encouraging could have easily engendered a large number of responses from those with fundamentally different approaches to preaching in other respects. Also, on reflection it might have been advisable to distinguish between ‘guide’ and ‘witness’ by presenting them as separate metaphors. ‘Guide’ may carry with it for many ministers the sense of leadership that is not conveyed by ‘witness’, whereas ‘witness’ brings in the sense of personal testimony and speaking from experience.

Do some of the theologically-oriented metaphors for the person and activity of the preacher have any correlation with the range of positive attitudes to preaching seen in our sample? The strongest correlation of the PPA factor is with Expositor, and it is quite striking. With a higher PPA factor there is a marked preference for preaching as exposition, in other words for teaching and explaining systematically from scripture. Typical of this high correlation, one such respondent commented,

The preaching and application of God's Word is central to bringing others to personal faith and to helping them grow as Christians. Without a proper grasp of the Bible and its application, there cannot be a proper living. Just as children need the right food and direction to develop into mature adults, so too do believers in a spiritual and practical manner.<sup>11</sup>

Valuing preaching highly is also to be found in those who see the preacher as Herald, and to a somewhat lesser extent in those who see the preacher as Guardian. Remember that Guardian was expanded as “Steward, preserver of truth of doctrine and expounding it faithfully.” The conclusion that we can draw from our survey is that among these more recently ordained ministers, a ‘high’ view of preaching tends to be held by those with evangelical and traditionally conservative views of the ways that preaching is or should be oriented around scripture and orthodoxy and their application to the life of the believer.

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<sup>11</sup> Male respondent, age 43.

Does this play out in practice? One indication that it does may be seen in the following example. It seems that a dedication to certain modes of preaching is interestingly linked to sermon length. Significant correlations are seen between preaching longer sermons and the view of the preacher as Expositor, Guardian and Herald, correlations that are largely missing from other views of the preaching ministry. Looking at the view of the preacher as Herald and the average length of sermon shows that of those whose sermons are customarily between 20 and 40 minutes, 18.6% Agree, 32.6% Strongly Agree, and 44.2% call Herald “Foundational for Preaching.” We have already seen that those with a high PPA factor tend to preach longer sermons, and that the PPA factor correlates quite strongly with Herald as a view of preaching, so this might not be unexpected. The result does however underline the fact that these attitudes do have a correlation with what happens ‘in the field.’

What is of interest to this study is not particularly whether Heralds and Expositors preach longer, but whether their educational preferences and learning styles differ from those of others less committed to this and related metaphors for the preacher. This I will consider next.

## **Educational Preferences**

One area of the questionnaire probed the respondents’ appreciation for the relatively recent educational activities afforded them during ordination training. Educational influences during ministry training were considered in Question 14, which asked:

How would you rate the following factors or experiences during ministry training on your formation as a preacher?

The methods *most* appreciated were: 1) Giving a sermon in placement church with feedback, 2) Giving a sermon followed by tutor or mentor feedback, and 3) Video or audio recording of own preaching. These were followed by ‘voice and public speaking training,’ and ‘giving a sermon followed by peer feedback.’ It is evident that the top five most appreciated educational methods all have a practical element to them. The respondents are affirming learning through doing, and through studying and practising the mechanics of preaching. There is also a strong element of reflection on practice that is present in four out of these five, either in the form of feedback from others or from audio-visual playback.

Those *least* appreciated – indeed active dislike is significantly represented in the responses – were: 1) lectures on theology of preaching and 2) lectures on practice

(the "how to") of preaching.<sup>12</sup> This seems consistent with theories of adult education which note the distinct preferences of adult learners for problem-based methods of learning over theoretical approaches. It may also point to an under-representation among younger ministers with a preference for analytical modes of learning as was discussed in chapter 2. Further research comparing this and similar findings with the research of Leslie Francis et al. into learning and personality type would seem promising.

Receiving feedback on preaching at one's placement church was not only the most highly rated for helpfulness, but it was also the most common experience. The system which affords practice and reflection on practice occasioned by feedback is doing something right by its ministers. The second most common experience of ministers was voice and public speaking training, which interestingly received a high number of both positive *and* negative approval ratings. Since, in my experience, it is extremely rare for ministers to seek voice training independently, the Church of Scotland training for candidates seems to be providing this as a matter of course at some stage for most candidates. The very mixed experience suggests either that some candidates do not perceive such work as necessary and helpful, or else that the provision is not of high enough standard to impress the candidate. More research is needed to determine the efficacy of voice and public speaking training for ministerial candidates, but this single statistic suggests that the provision needs to be studied.

Along the same lines, there are clearly some areas where institutional provision is not much appreciated by anyone. 'Hearing staff and visiting preachers,' along with 'lectures on the theology and on the practice of preaching' were fairly regularly reported as negative influences. This was expressed forcefully by a comment made in response to this question area:

The problem with training was that people who weren't preachers were put in charge of those who were called to be preachers.<sup>13</sup>

A felt lack of positive role models may also be behind this sentiment. Conversely, peer feedback was deemed "quite helpful" or better by a large percentage of those who experienced it, but again it should be noted that in practice it did not happen for 40% of the respondents.

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<sup>12</sup> Implications of the research for lecture-based ministerial training in theological colleges will be considered in the conclusion of this thesis. Again, it is important to remember that such lectures had been experienced by under two-thirds of the respondents.

<sup>13</sup> Male respondent, age 42.



Interestingly, there are some strong correlations between the preferences for educational methods: ‘feedback from placement church’ is very strongly correlated with ‘tutor feedback,’ and both correlate with ‘learning by analysing examples.’ The reflective practitioner will feel benefit from structures that allow or encourage the theological practice and reflection cycle, but of course not everyone is quite so well disposed to ‘learn from their mistakes.’<sup>14</sup> However, as we have noted, such educational method was experienced by quite a small proportion of the respondents (evaluated by only 38 out of 92).

The most unexpected outcome was that when the PPA factor was analysed with these educational variables, there were in fact no strong correlations of any statistical significance with any of them. Based on my estimation of the way preaching is conceived by those who value preaching highly (as the metaphors of Herald, Guardian and Expositor indicate), I expected that conceptually-oriented teaching methods such as lecturing and reading assignments would be favoured, but this was not the case on this reading of the data received from this sample. It would seem that learning methods aligned with good adult educational practice are recognised as such by a large proportion of the respondents, regardless of their sense of vocation, commitment to preaching or theological position.

### **Post-ordination influences**

Considering the influences on their preaching that respondents have had since ordination, there is more to be said about the PPA factor. Again, though, that experience is patchy. Fewer than a third had been on a short course on preaching since ordination. About one in six had taken a degree course. 55% had been on “conferences, seminars or workshops focussed on preaching” and these were considered either Quite Helpful or Very Helpful by 46% of the respondents (which therefore represents four out of five of those who had experience of them). In terms of expressed helpfulness, this was only exceeded by receiving feedback from the congregation about one’s preaching, with 54% of those experiencing that finding it Quite Helpful, and a further 33% rating it Very Helpful, or a total of nearly 9 out of 10 of those experiencing it. This seems to indicate that congregational feedback goes beyond the one-line, less than helpful “Good sermon, thank you” delivered on the way out of church, and towards intentional formal or informal ways of involving the congregation in reflecting on the preaching event.

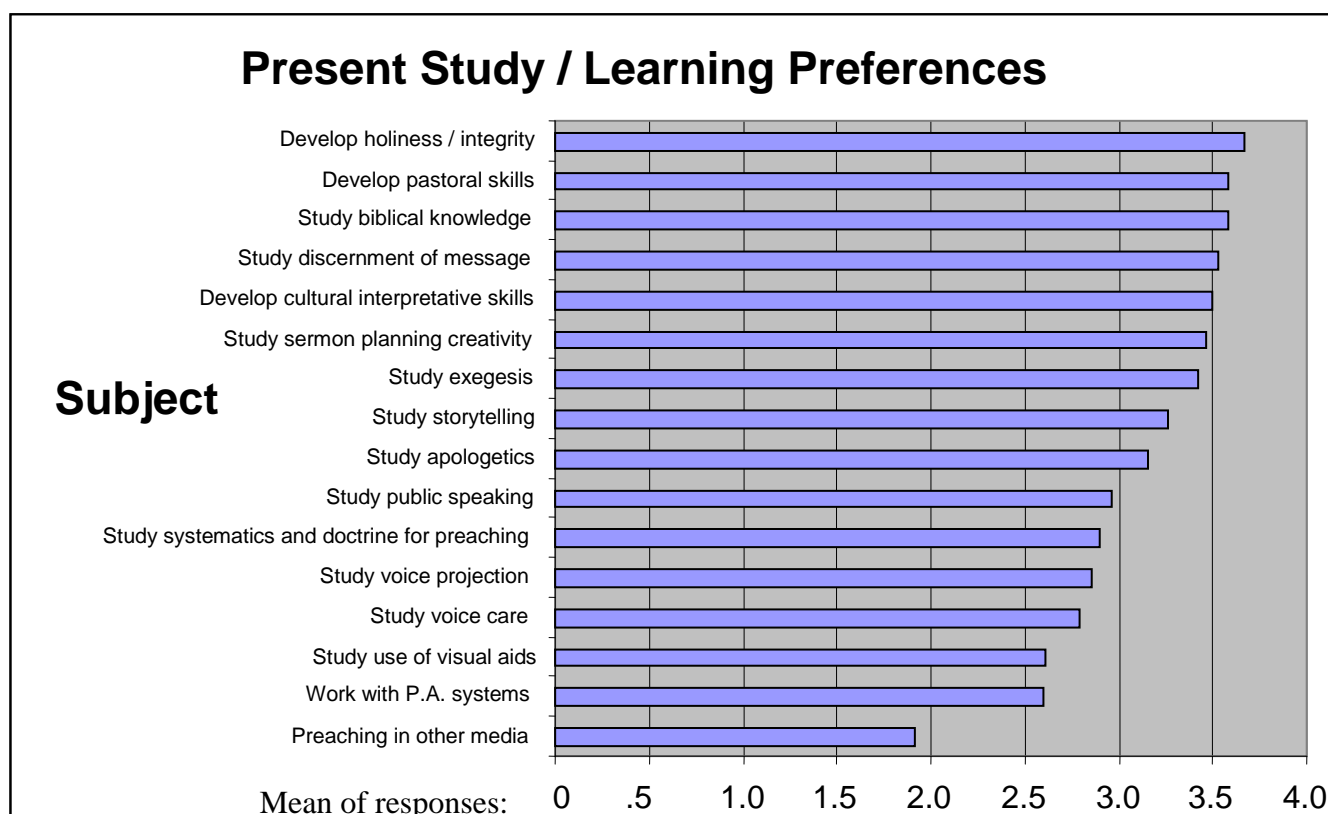
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<sup>14</sup> See Kolb, *Experiential Learning* and Lamdin and Tilley, *Supporting New Ministers*, pp. 56-57.

Amongst those with a high PPA factor, the strongest correlation was with finding short courses on preaching helpful, although again there were small numbers (n=26) commenting on such courses. High correlations of the PPA factor were also found with conferences and workshops on preaching, and with reading books on preaching. We might suppose from this that more motivated preachers attend conferences, and believe that they gain from them to a greater extent than less motivated preachers. We might also consider that such motivation extends to reading books about preaching. In fact, independently of the PPA factor, where preachers have attended short courses, their positive attitude to courses correlates very strongly with the attitude to conferences, to reading books on preaching, and to a smaller extent finding feedback from peers helpful. This is not particularly revolutionary, but with the assumption that adult learners know what is best for them, it may provide useful guidance for those coordinating post-ordination training. This guidance may be further enhanced by considering what ministers considered important for their continuing professional development, to which I now turn.

### **Continuing professional development**

Looking at the preferences for future study opportunities uncovered some even stronger positive correlations. Figure 6.2 shows the value respondents placed on subjects offered for future development or study. Some subjects are more susceptible to training and course work than others, but the list was as full as possible to invite respondents to consider carefully their understanding of themselves as preachers on a learning trajectory.



**Figure 6.2**

The high scores for almost all of the subjects offered are an indication that the respondents agreed that these components of preaching<sup>15</sup> were worthy of some kind of attention from them. It should be noted that it was possible to evaluate a subject (however important *theoretically* or at some other stage in life) as “not a priority at this time.” In fact, very few subjects were considered not to be important for preaching by very many of the respondents. The ranking of this list may be useful to those responsible for planning programmes of continuing ministerial education.

Of the subjects considered most important, the top four were: developing holiness and integrity, developing pastoral understanding of the people, biblical knowledge, and the process of discerning a message to preach from the biblical text. The first two of these one suspects are not susceptible to being taught, or even learned in any systematic fashion. Nevertheless they reflect important core beliefs about the nature of the preaching ministry. “Developing pastoral understanding” suggests a strong sense of responsibility to the listening congregation, and it also suggests a desire to carry the diaconal (serving) and pastoral (leading and caring) responsibilities of the minister into the pulpit. For the second subject, one would blanch at the thought of a

<sup>15</sup> As suggested by the Questionnaire.

course purporting to teach holiness or aiming to impart integrity, but again, they are considered by so much of the wisdom on preaching to be *sine qua non* that their affirmation here is re-assuring about the understanding of preaching currently at large in the Church of Scotland.

The third most favoured topic represents a subject area that seems amenable to active study and traditional modes of teaching and learning. The fourth subject can be developed to a limited degree through study, and usefully taught on a course, but even so, the ability to discern a message to preach is the kind of knowing-in-action<sup>16</sup> that I have discussed in chapter 4. The place in this ranking of the two biblically oriented subjects represents another affirmation by this sample of a traditional and core belief about preaching that its biblical connection is crucial to proper practice.

Those respondents high on the scale of the PPA factor indicated somewhat different priorities. The four subjects correlating most strongly with this factor were:

1. Ability to discern a message to preach from the biblical text
2. Ability to argue apologetically in defence of the Christian faith
3. Ability to communicate systematic theology / doctrine in the pulpit
4. Develop holiness / integrity<sup>17</sup>

By comparison, in the ranking provided by the whole survey sample (n=90), these four come in at, respectively, no. 4, no 9, no 12 and no 2. In other words only the ability to argue apologetically is put in the top three of training/development priority.

In the former, high PPA group there is a distinct preference expressed here for subjects that have a high degree of association with the content of the Christian faith, its beliefs, its doctrines and its biblical witness. A concern for the truthfulness of the Christian faith is affirmed here, along of course with the recognition of the importance of personal spirituality to the preaching ministry. What this tells us is that in the present approach to learning preaching of those with a high PPA factor (and in common with the sample as a whole) the nature of the biblical foundation or basis for preaching is affirmed. Secondly, and more significantly, these are subjects with a high conceptual content. These are topics whose discourse is in the realm of doctrine, abstractions and logical argument. The interest in the ability to argue apologetically, for instance, correlates across the whole sample very strongly with interest in systematics and doctrine, biblical exegesis and biblical knowledge. No. 2 and no. 3 are also marked by the emphasis on communication as an act of persuasion, closest

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<sup>16</sup> See Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*, p. 49ff.

<sup>17</sup> These four demonstrate a correlation coefficient range of .294 to .260, significant to 0.01 level (n=92).

to the preaching metaphors of Herald, Guardian and Expositor. Rather by contrast, across the whole sample interest in developing interpretative understanding of culture correlates strongly with pastoral understanding and with storytelling, as well as with voice projection and voice care. Again it is worth stressing that it is not my principal purpose to compare or evaluate understandings of what is important in preaching, but to discover how learning communities of preachers undertake to gain proficiencies and understandings.

None of these topics for what I have termed continuing professional development correlate significantly with gender in this study, so although the PPA factor has a degree of gender alignment towards males, this does not come out statistically in the views that ministers have about what would benefit their preaching.

One conclusion is that those who score highly on the PPA factor have a present understanding and approach to preaching that is marked by a concern for biblical content, for conceptually-oriented process, and for proclamation and persuasion. Being about present attitudes, these particular factors do not tell us how ministers responding to our survey learned to preach, still less how preaching should be taught, but it may help us to interpret the PPA factor in our conclusion to this chapter, as we turn finally to looking at the earliest influences on preachers covered in our survey, that of role models and mentors.

## **Role models and mentors**

I am considering these important aspects of learning last in this chapter in order to do so with the enhanced understanding gained through looking at educational preferences, post-ordination influences, attitudes to continuing professional development, and what I have termed the PPA factor arising from the data.

The influence of role models on early development is of course particularly difficult to ascertain through a quantitative instrument such as this multiple choice questionnaire. What has served well to gauge reactions, preferences and attitudes across a large sample will struggle to ‘prove’ the existence of factors that depend on fallible memory, are often coloured by emotion and have very little in the way of shared baseline. For instance, my unquestionable and deep admiration for the preaching of David Watson, and the profound changes in my life which took place as a result of hearing his preaching some 30 years ago, are (I judge) almost certainly linked with the way I now preach, but I cannot specify easily or precisely how or in what ways. Empirically valid connections would only be uncovered through

extended conversation or reflection and discourse analysis comparing my interview with those of others. (And it is precisely this kind of analysis that we will look at in the next field study.)

### **Admiration and early influence of preaching**

Two questions attempted to gauge the importance to the respondents of preachers and preaching in the past. On a four-point Likert scale indicating Disagreement – Agreement they rated the following statements.

I have heard preachers in my life whom I particularly admired and through whose preaching God has spoken to me.

The ordained ministers whom I most admired were notable for their preaching.

98% Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the first statement, and within that the majority (59% of the valid sample) felt able to Strongly Agree. This is a challenging result when compared with the low view of preaching that is reflected in some of the literature, as I discussed in my Introduction.<sup>18</sup> Certainly it does provide us with a strong link between the function or purpose of preaching as a channel or means of God's communication, and the personal attitude (in this case admiration) towards at least some of the preachers that the respondent has heard and remembered.

The purpose of the second question was to elicit further the existence of admiration felt toward role models. Here there is still a very significant indication that the respondents in this sample were predisposed to receive significant models for their preaching ministry from preachers that they admired. Thus 76% Agreed or Strongly Agreed with this second statement, with over a quarter (28% of the valid sample) able to Strongly Agree with the statement.

This was my first indicator of the importance of hearing other preachers in the formation of the ministers responding to the survey. It also seems to substantiate the link often affirmed in the literature of educational psychology between the effect of a role model and admiration felt or held towards that role model.

The next set of questions attempted to draw out the patterning effect of preachers whom the respondents remembered hearing. Although the existence of admired preachers was beyond question, the patterning or modelling effect of those preachers is less clearly indicated. While 67% were able to Agree or Strongly Agree with the

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<sup>18</sup> Here one is reminded of the challenging disparity between congregational views of the preaching they heard and the views of their own preachers, uncovered by Mark Greene's research, in Greene, *The Three-Eared Preacher*.

statement that they have heard preachers on whose theology they have tended to model their own preaching, the number Strongly Agreeing with the statement was only 21%. A degree of acknowledged influence on style of preaching was admitted by only 50%, while having been given a template or pattern for their preaching was acknowledged by 52%. In each case scarcely 10% of respondents felt able to Strongly Agree that other preachers whom they had heard had given them models for preaching. I would observe that this may still mask the true extent of the effect of the model, but we must content ourselves with conscious rather than unconscious influences in a survey such as this.

Some gender differences were to be seen here, with up to 6% of female ministers disagreeing with the statement that they had heard preachers in their life whom they particularly admired and through whom God had spoken to them. A more significant lack of positive role models is seen in the statistic that only 17% of women – as against 34% of men – felt able to Strongly Agree that the ordained ministers they most admired were notable for their preaching.<sup>19</sup> By and large this is also reflected in a decreased tendency among female ministers to agree that they were modelling their style or pattern of preaching on preachers they had heard in their life, with a majority disagreeing or even strongly disagreeing with the statements. Interestingly, the women in the survey were fairly closely aligned with the men on their estimation of how the theology of their preaching has been modelled on preachers they had heard. Their relative willingness to see themselves as having departed from role models in style and pattern will be picked up in the review of the qualitative data based on interviews with ministers that I cover in chapter 8.

## **Mentoring and the influence of mentors**

The next question in the survey sought to ascertain whether there was a significant amount of influence at the hands of mentors taking place before ordination training. 52% of respondents ordained in the last 14 years reported some degree of direct involvement of a role model with their own preaching, and for virtually all of them this was a positive experience, half of whom were willing to call it ‘strongly positive’, and half ‘fairly positive’. No negative ratings for mentor influence were submitted at all.

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<sup>19</sup> I believe that this calls for and should feed into further research, conducted longitudinally and focussing specifically on the existence of positive role models for women ministers, as it will be important to establish whether increasing numbers of women entering the ministry eventually become the positive role models for young women receiving a call in the future, and if so how that may be fostered.

There is indicated an overwhelming endorsement for the perceived effect of positive role models in a mentoring capacity. One qualifying observation is that admiration can cloud or distort the memory of just how helpful the mentor has been. It goes along with admiration to think positively about the object, and there might be a disinclination to make a negative estimation of the impact or helpfulness about an admired figure. However, some do clearly appreciate the specific value of a mentor or coach, and something of this value is conveyed by the following comment:

The input of specific preachers has been of infinitely more value to me than training received because it has been relational and based on a common understanding of the unique place that a preaching ministry has in the life of the church.<sup>20</sup>

The difference between a role model and a mentor is important to bear in mind. Some respondents appeared to interpret a role model as responsible for imprinting or furthering the adoption of similar procedure, style or theology. A mentor or coach was perceived as helping the individual 'mentee' develop in some ways their own style. Thus:

While I have 'role models', most have encouraged me to develop my own style - this has been very important to me.<sup>21</sup>

Reflection on experiences during education and training produced a slightly greater frequency of mentoring experience: 66% of those more recently ordained (vs. 60% of those preaching 14 years or more) reported having someone who had mentored, coached or directly and personally evaluated them on their preaching. Their experiences, though more mixed than the experience of role models (perhaps showing a reduction of the admiration effect seen in having role models who were mentors), still pointed to a significant positive impact: 59% were Fairly or Strongly positive.<sup>22</sup>

There was in addition a strong correlation between an early role model's influence as a mentor and an education mentor's influence.<sup>23</sup> In other words those who thought that they benefited from the mentoring of a role model tended also to benefit later from mentoring provided in ordination training. As it is difficult to see how in practice the same person might serve in both guises for a developing preacher, the

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<sup>20</sup> Male respondent, age 38.

<sup>21</sup> Female respondent, age 43.

<sup>22</sup> Of the 63 with experience of role models, 6 were negative or strongly negative, 10 were neutral, 31 were fairly positive, and 14 called it a strongly positive influence, with 2 responses missing.

<sup>23</sup> Non-parametric correlations test indicated a strong positive association of .459 significant at the .01 level.



most likely explanation is that receptivity to mentoring is an important factor to a positive mentoring experience, and that may contribute as much to the experience as the quality of the mentoring. Here is an area for further research that could be grounded in the kinds of personality profiling and learning style differences highlighted in chapter 2.

Certainly positive experience of mentoring was recognised. The value of an effective mentor in the minister who is supervising a placement is typified by the following comment:

The Senior Minister under whom I trained in my probationary period was himself well trained as a Trainer and the Church would do well to maintain this kind of quality role model in a Probationer's experience.<sup>24</sup>

Implications for best practice in developing preachers will be taken up in the final chapter of this thesis.

I was surprised to find that there were no significant correlations detected between the experiences of mentoring (either from role models or in education) and the PPA factor. The preachers' present view of preaching was not associated particularly with an experience, positive or otherwise, of having a mentor before or during ordination. Neither did the age of the respondent or the length of their preaching experience relate to their experience of mentoring.

## **Gender and mentoring**

Of those with 14 or fewer years' preaching experience since being ordained, women reported a considerably higher incidence than men of experiencing an educational mentor / coach: 78% (n=28) of women as against 60% (n=35) of men reported having had experience of mentoring during formative education. Their evaluation of those experiences were more affirmative, 83% reporting it as either Fairly positive (54%) or Strongly positive (29%). Men were more critical: 15% (representing 5 cases) were slightly or strongly negative, 17.6% were Neutral, 47% were Fairly positive and only 18% Strongly positive.<sup>25</sup> Clearly there are significant differences between the experiences of women and men in this survey, and further research, building on social and psychological studies in the secular business world, should attempt to confirm, for instance, whether there are gender-related tendencies to

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<sup>24</sup> Male respondent, age 55.

<sup>25</sup> The correlation between 'gender' and 'influence of an education mentor' expresses this in another way – a significant correlation coefficient of .323 between being a woman and being able to report positive influence from mentor / coach.

benefit from such ways of learning or whether the comparative newness to ministry, and the lack of female role models and mentors has affected the historical experiences of the women in this sample.

## ***Conclusion***

Development as a preacher, particularly for those who were ordained in the last fifteen years, does not apparently proceed along regular trajectories. Mentors are a highly positive influence for those who had experienced coaching and oversight from such a figure, especially when that figure had been a role model prior to ordination. However, fewer than 60% of preachers surveyed here said they had had a mentor. Women were more likely than men to report positive experiences of mentoring, and this calls for further research. Mentoring within the formal educational structures was less common than mentoring happening earlier along with the influence of role models. It was also less universally appreciated, and it would seem to be that mentoring during training lacks either an affective element, such as may be expected with the presence of admired role models, or it lacks a pedagogical element, owing perhaps to the higher prominence within the younger student's experience of dedicated mentoring for preaching. These are speculations, however, and there is potential for further research in this area as well.

Practice followed by feedback is far more commonly enjoyed and positively experienced, and this is a significant example of the clear preference expressed for learning through reflection on practice. Reading and in-class analysis of examples were in a second tier of preferred learning approaches, while developing theoretical understanding or knowledge through lectures was least appreciated. However there were significantly fewer experiences of these theory-oriented ways of developing as a preacher, no doubt reflecting the generally non-course-based approach to developing preaching in the Church of Scotland in the last 15 years.

A positive attitude to preaching (the PPA factor) as reflected in a personal sense of vocation and the estimation of preaching's importance in their own ministries and in the life of the church is not evenly shared by the sample. The set of male respondents contained in their midst a group of extremely enthusiastic preachers, but this distribution was not mirrored in the set of female respondents. The male group as a whole averaged a higher PPA factor. A strong PPA factor is closely correlated with a theological understanding of preaching as proclamation, as educative, and as being primarily concerned with guarding doctrinal truth and its biblical basis. These

theologically conservative preachers seem most likely to seek training that will pedagogically strengthen their doctrinal and biblically-derived understandings and that will improve their ability to communicate these understandings didactically to their congregations. However, and surprisingly, such a strongly positive attitude to preaching does not seem tied to any other form of past learning that the respondents were asked to evaluate.

The serving ministers of the Church of Scotland who participated in this survey have shown that preaching is an important part of their ministry. This is seen in their high level of participation, the great number of helpful additional comments made, and the ranking given to preaching compared with other activities and responsibilities. They have been prepared to reflect carefully and fully in my survey on their development as preachers. However it is not apparently the case that there is anything like a uniform path for their development, agreed professional competencies, or standardised training offered to them in their ministerial formation. We shall consider the implications for learning preaching, for institutions and for individual adult learners taking responsibility for their own development, in the final chapter of this thesis.

It is also important to recognise the limitations of quantitative research when investigating affective responses, effects estimated over time, and attitudes towards past events. This survey by multiple choice questionnaire has been limited in what it can delineate in the progress of adult learners who are developing in an activity as complex as preaching, although many trends and attitudes are clearly discernable.

The concept of community of practice does not figure specifically and by name in the analysis of the data of this field study. Instead the analysis seems to support the existence of, and positive value accorded to several social forms of learning. Taken together these indicate that to a limited extent it is possible say that situated learning is taking place within communities of practice. These communities are comprised of less experienced practitioners in loose pedagogical and imitative relationship with more experienced preachers and with their congregational listeners. The participation of these preachers is both legitimate and peripheral, for the acquisition of full status only happens at a later stage in their development as preachers. The next two chapters will look at qualitative data to further examine this model of learning, analysing the words and thoughts of preachers themselves, before conclusions are drawn from the quantitative results of the field study in this chapter.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Field Study 2: Preachers' Autobiographical Essays**

#### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I analyse the discourse of fifteen preachers writing for *Pulpit Journeys*, a book that I edited in 2004-2005. I am looking for evidence of the kinds of learning experience that I examined from a theoretical perspective in chapters 2, 3 and 4. The discourse of vocation or calling to preach is well represented, and indicates a ground for learning motivation that must not be underestimated when considering preaching development as adult learning.<sup>1</sup> Such a motivation is optimised when accompanied by a high level of self-reflection in learning as well as an openness to instruction from mentors and to the conscious or unconscious imitation of role models. Few preachers wrote here of positive experiences of institutional training, but many recognised the way they had been shaped by the practices in the church in which they grew up as Christians. These are arguably diluted forms of situated learning within communities of practice, and support a primary argument of my thesis, that such social learning theory can contribute to the ways that the church calls and brings on its preaching ministers.

#### ***Categories of learning experience***

##### **Self-reflection**

A search for self-reflection in learning *per se* produced a very small number of explicit references. These were Mike Breen's "I have discovered story as the principle method of conveying the message," Roger Forster's admission that he was unwittingly reproducing some of the ideas of C. S. Lewis and Anthony Reddie's realisation that his storytelling elders were imprinting on him certain patterns and an ethos. Reddie's appreciation of the discontinuity between his earlier shyness and present "wordiness" is evidence of self-reflection in learning. Seldom does a coherent picture emerge from any writer of particular stages of his/her development as a preacher, although many relate stories of early experiences. It may be argued that through the enterprise of writing for the book all the authors demonstrate most substantially and convincingly a high degree of self-reflection in learning.

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss the theology of vocation or calling to preach more fully at the beginning of ch. 8, where it is particularly pertinent to the discourse of Methodist preachers.

## **Encouragement and feedback**

Very few words were written on the areas of encouragement and feedback on preaching. Only one writer wrote specifically about the importance to a preacher's development of the giving and receiving of encouragement. Similarly, receiving feedback on sermons was mentioned by only three writers, one of whom talked about this in terms of a mentor's activity. Many more wrote about the positive effects of a mentor or trainer, and this will be considered shortly.

## **Formal instruction**

There were fewer than 300 words, from four writers, on the importance of institutional training to their preaching development. Only two of them mentioned specific institutions. Significantly these two institutions were evangelical colleges with a tradition of educational commitment to preaching. A third writer mentioned a seminary in the United States where homiletics was taught (in contrast to the paucity of such courses in UK ministerial training.) This gives a small amount of support to the supposition that formal instruction in preaching can be beneficial where significant training is given and where it occurs in an educational establishment with a commitment to preaching that matches the theology and preaching practice of the wing of the church with which it is most closely allied or identified.<sup>2</sup>

## **Peer group influence**

There were fewer than 150 words, from three writers, which made any mention of the importance to them of peers in their learning to preach, and it does not appear for these contributors that the effect of peers on their preaching development was significant.

## ***Vocation and calling***

Thirteen out of fifteen writers wrote about their call or vocation to preach, some in considerable detail, and about the sense of inner drive or passion that they feel about it. The material coded in the software to these categories amounted to around 4,300 words. On the one hand this is not surprising, given the wording of the invitation to contribute to the book, as I have discussed in chapter 5. On the other hand there are pronounced commonalities running through their accounts of how they have come to see themselves as preachers.

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<sup>2</sup> See The Vox Project Report, Stevenson and Wilkinson, *The Vox Project*. Also Bence, 'An Analysis of the Effect of Contrasting Theologies of Preaching on the Teaching of Preaching in British Institutions of Higher Learning'.

For Richard Bewes, one of his parents named what he inwardly ‘knew to be true’ that he would be a preacher, although he had not named it himself. This was confirmed for him by a later event that reinforced the correctness of this self-perception, and that encouraged him to believe that the aspiration was achievable. The external nature of the call is emphasised in this writer’s account, as being necessary to reflect and convey fully and fairly the guidance of God, where an internal sense or conviction would be unreliable or untrustworthy on its own. We may note that the discourse of call carries with it the assumption of God outside the preacher moulding them, shaping their direction and self-understanding. Somewhat in contrast to Bewes’s account, Mike Breen was gripped by the sense that he needed to preach. He said that as a young man, “I was captured by preaching and I was captured by the call to preach.”<sup>3</sup> He emphasises the inner sensation, but also describes beginning ordination training, recognising that in the Church of England there is a lengthy process of evaluation and testing before admittance. He wrote,

It was a tender age to begin my training; but it seemed clear that this was God’s call and all seemed to attest to the rightness of the decision.<sup>4</sup>

Baptist preacher and evangelist Steve Chalke had an experience in which the salient (for him) features of Christian commitment, positive action and lifestyle were affirmed. He recalls coming home from a Baptist youth club meeting and telling his mother:

I think I’ve become a Christian, and I’m going to spend the rest of my life telling people about Jesus and when I grow up I’m going to set up a hostel, a hospital and a school for the poor.<sup>5</sup>

For him these were implied logically by an acceptance of the fact that “God loves me.” A passionate desire and almost driven quality were likewise expressed by Andy Hawthorne in his interview: “God gave me an evangelist’s heart, there’s absolutely no doubt about it.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly Simon Vibert’s call to preach was bound up with his conversion experience as may be seen in his reflection: “I just assumed that anyone who had come to faith would be equally desperate to tell others about it at every opportunity!”<sup>7</sup> I noted, though, that this same writer refers to a vicar who encouraged him to preach because he “had seen in me what I hadn’t yet even seen in myself: a

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<sup>3</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

call to preach.”<sup>8</sup> David Wilkinson wrote: “Very early in my preaching journey I felt God calling me to be an evangelist. It was an extremely clear call, not something that I usually experience.”<sup>9</sup>

For Baptist minister Ian Coffey the sense of inner call, “the call of Christ on a person’s life” is determinate of the preacher’s identity, nature and even effectiveness. He also stated that “to be called to preach the Gospel of Christ is better than anything.”<sup>10</sup> The URC minister Susan Durber says she knew at 8 years old “that I should do what the priest did; take the service, sing the responses and, more than anything, preach.”<sup>11</sup> An important thrust of her essay is that she found a truer realisation of this vocation in a reconnection with “childhood delights, pleasures and longings” than through the male models of preaching that shaped her at first.

Joel Edwards, growing up in an African-Caribbean church, could say, “For as long as I could remember I loved preaching.”<sup>12</sup> There was a significant external event (the church camp chapel service and bonfire afterwards) that served to confirm or ratify the validity of the inner call. Faith Forster understands preaching in terms of a strong sense of God’s call. Roger Forster wrote that he understood that his call to be a Christian believer was bound up and inextricably linked to his call to preach: “I knew within weeks of my conversion that I would be spending my life preaching this wonderful Jesus who had set fire to my heart and life.”<sup>13</sup> Also he wrote, “Whatever it was that had laid hold of me, it was a calling to preach, and it drove me to make Christ known.”<sup>14</sup>

Similarly Methodist minister Leslie Griffiths had an urge, and experienced an inner sense of need, though he confessed more than some to a struggle or questioning process:

Was I myself going to be a preacher? That became a question I could not shake off. I began preaching as a direct response to the stimuli I’ve been describing. I began to sense a focussed need to make my own effort to share good news and announce God’s kingdom.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 131.



Anthony Reddie wrote more openly than most about the mixed motives some recognise in any passionately undertaken endeavour:

Well the truth is, I simply love preaching. I know it is godly business, all this preaching stuff, but I would never be so disingenuous as to pretend that a healthy (or should I say unhealthy) dose of egoism does not find itself in the business of preaching.<sup>16</sup>

Vocation is clearly a motivating factor for this writer, one that arrived with renewed force later in his ministry as he experimented with a different preaching model. One part of his understanding of the way in which a sense of divine vocation relates to natural talents or gifts is revealed when he states, “I have come to learn to trust my improvisatory skills and instincts.”<sup>17</sup>

For many of these preachers the call to preach goes beyond the discourse of ministerial development used by some denominations, for they are speaking of what are for them strong psychological realities and significant staging posts in their journeys of faith. For most of them the conception of ‘call’ is not exclusively an inwardly felt compulsion. In almost all cases the language is geared towards the transcendent: it refers to a ‘call’ that exists unheard and unspoken by human agency, and deriving from a God who has plans and desires for human-kind.<sup>18</sup> Whatever its origin, an inner call of some considerable intensity exists in these men and women, and this call or vocation is foundational for their learning progress. As such this call is closely bound up with the early development of the preacher, for it leads to much intentional activity as they seek mentors, training, and opportunities to preach.

### ***Role models***

The preachers who wrote for *Pulpit Journeys* testified that role models were by far the most significant influence on them. In over one sixth of the entire book – approximately 10,400 words – they refer to models that have influenced them, naming in total about 75 individuals. Of course one must recognise the priority given to this aspect in the original invitation to contribute to the book, as discussed previously. Thus this pre-eminence in their accounts may not be used to generalise

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> A strict rationalist might suggest that all such religious convictions should be subjected to some kind of psychological analysis. This is at base a philosophical challenge to the theological categories of theistic belief that would be shared by most or all of the writers. And yet, as in our discussion of the Holy Spirit in the introduction, the modes of discourse seldom have common ground. ‘I am not making this up’ is an important declaration for the believer to be able to make, but it is also language that customarily makes statements that are unverifiable, and are thus meaningless to the positivist.

beyond this particular data set. I find however that there are features of role modelling and practice modelling which are significant for this study.

Invariably the writers speak of their role models with tones of admiration, and even reverence. In these role models were men (mostly men, representing the historical situation in the churches in which they grew up) who demonstrated successful practice of preaching. Their methods must therefore be worthy of imitation. They had engaging personalities, along with status and positions of responsibility, which together invoke the principle of classical rhetoric that effective preaching depends on the *ethos* of the speaker. Such qualities were all in general worthy of aspiration for the writers concerned. Working only with the written documents, it is not possible to identify with precision the motives in the writers individually. However the cumulative effect of their discourse and the numbers involved leave no doubt that modelling has influenced these preachers greatly.

Leslie Griffiths, a Welsh Methodist, expressed very well the sense of being shaped by others in his past, though not all are identifiable:

I didn't think I knew people who could be singled out in the way that those editing this book were asking. In the words of the poet Thomas Grey, it was "village Miltons" and "roses born to blush unseen and waste their fragrance on a desert air" who surrounded me as I grew and developed.<sup>19</sup>

At first this writer is only willing and able to acknowledge the significance of role models in a general and diffuse way, almost as it were an atmosphere in which he grew up, and later in this chapter we will discuss the non-specific education provided by a community and its culture. Here Griffiths uses another powerful metaphor for the influence of role models as he continues:

And yet, having begun, I realised just what a legacy these apparently inconsequential people left to me. Their cumulative effect has been considerable. Like tributaries that run into a river they've (even if unwittingly) contributed to the flow of my own preaching. Indeed, in many ways, they constitute that flow. My task has been to manage its energies and allow myself to be carried away by its currents rather than to seek to change its direction.<sup>20</sup>

The stories in his essay paint pictures of models and mentors who shaped him through direct advice, through demonstrating ways of preaching, through creating

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<sup>19</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

images of preaching style and through modelling a personal integrity that was highly attractive. A significant insight here is in the last sentence of the quotation above, in which the writer realises that those formative influences are immensely powerful and were responsible for much more than he was directly able to control. A student is unable to be fully self-actualised and intentionally directed, but with enough self-awareness may ‘manage the energies’ and allow him or herself to be carried by the currents of the influences. This was echoed by Anthony Reddie, who described the impact of a model:

Reflecting back on the brilliance that was the Revd Dr William R. Davies in the Eastbrook Hall in Bradford, I witnessed in his preaching, glimpses of the method and approach that I would later discover for myself.<sup>21</sup>

For a good number of the preachers writing here, their models have seemingly worked on them to shape their preaching in precisely the ways we examined in chapter 3. In some cases the influence of the role model had the more interactive, didactic, and intentional qualities that we have associated with mentoring in chapter 4. So let us turn to mentoring in the writings of the authors of *Pulpit Journeys*.

### ***Mentoring***

Mentoring is referred to or described with approximately 3,500 words by ten of the fifteen essays. As previously explored for this thesis, mentoring involves an interaction with the ‘mentee’ in ways that can usually be described with action words such as “encouraged”, “shared”, “criticised” and “spoke to me.” Thus Roger Forster wrote:

Another of my earliest mentors in Bible study was an old preacher called G. H. Lang. I didn’t necessarily agree with all his views, but he made me look at the text and ask what it really said rather than what I’d like it to say...<sup>22</sup>

Here the effect of Forster’s mentor is to challenge him to think more deeply, or to think again. Forster recognised this, at least in retrospect, as necessary and important, despite the theological differences implied in his remark that he “didn’t necessarily agree with all his views.” What those views were and how Forster differed from his

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

mentor are not stated, yet the statement indicates that complete theological congruence is not always necessary for the mentor to be effective.<sup>23</sup>

One preacher, Ian Coffey, spoke specifically in terms of mentoring as it occurs in a community of practice, arguably part of the pattern or model that we have termed the Legitimate Peripheral Participation of the preacher:

When I left theological college back in 1975 I spent five years working with a team of evangelists. This was an important time of formation for me. They were all quality men who had a passion for the gospel and for some reason they took a brash twenty-three year-old under their wing as they undertook church-based missions all over the United Kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

This sounds like a powerful and effective training situation, even if it is rare and only experienced by a chosen few, although this is not stated. He goes on to describe the features of this mentoring:

That was my apprenticeship; school assemblies, classroom discussions and endless coffee mornings combined with working alongside a team of skilled preachers. Peter Anderson, John Blanchard, Derek Cleave, Derek Cook, Dave Pope all mentored me in an informal, unstructured way. They showed me the truth of Phillips Brookes' classic definition: 'Preaching is the bringing of truth through personality.'<sup>25</sup>

Important mentoring phrases here include "under their wing," "my apprenticeship," "working alongside a team of skilled preachers," "mentored me in an informal, unstructured way," and "they showed me the truth of ..." Here we can see an example of situated learning taking place in a kind of community of practice as introduced in chapter 4.

Rob Frost affirmed the importance of mentoring and coaching even as he bemoaned the lack of it in the development of young preachers:

Many of them have never been affirmed by their pastor, never been given an opportunity to test their call, never had helpful sermon crits [criticisms], let alone been given basic skills in the craft of evangelistic sermon-making.<sup>26</sup>

Each of these influences are direct, intentional and interventionist, and beyond the control of the mentee or developing preacher to provide for themselves. Apart from

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<sup>23</sup> Recall the discussion in ch. 3 of Bence, 'An Analysis of the Effect of Contrasting Theologies of Preaching on the Teaching of Preaching in British Institutions of Higher Learning'.

<sup>24</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

the latter writer, mentioning “affirmation from the pastor,” most do not prescribe how such mentoring is to be provided. It is worth noting that Frost has principally served within the Methodist system.

Those from the Methodist denomination had a structure of training that often included formal mentoring, depending on their age, as expressed by Faith Forster:

I suppose everyone remembers the first time they preach. Mine came when I was 17 years of age. I was being guided and mentored by the pastor of the Methodist mission.<sup>27</sup>

In this case, the writer refers with more approval to the opportunity to preach “entrusted to her” and that was offered “while he was on holiday.” It was the experience of preaching that was “encouraging and positive” rather than a specific action by or relationship with the pastor.

This will be seen to accord with the testimonies of the Methodists in my third field study, who usually only mentioned in passing the formal, church-assigned mentors they had, and seldom referred to an active, positive influence from them. Such beneficial effects as occurred from mentoring seemed to be taking place in more ad hoc arrangements.

## **Encouragement and apprenticeship**

Mentoring that is valued nearly always occurs within a context of practice and experimentation. Steve Chalke said:

When I was 21 I met a guy called David Beer. David’s a good communicator, and has been a fantastic friend to me through the years. I worked with him for a year before going to Spurgeon’s College and then afterwards I went to work in Tonbridge in Kent for four years with him. Again, I was given lots of opportunity and experience. So I have always worked with people who have given me the opportunity which has been fantastic.<sup>28</sup>

One kind of educational intervention that some mentors can give to students is the opportunity to work in a situation that is ‘live’ i.e. not just for practice. This was particularly valued by Chalke, and by Hawthorne. Thus Andy Hawthorne’s story presents a defining moment in his journey, in which his potential was recognised and tested by the community. After consultation with others (mainly peers) in the community, his youth group leader who was to later act as a mentor gave him the opportunity to preach in a significant setting:

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

I remember that the first time, when Wallace Benn recognised there was some sort of a gift to communicate in me, I was probably aged 18. We used to have a Youth Group Committee to plan our annual mission, and we had always hired these big-name preachers to do the mission for us. Somebody, one of the youth group said “No, we think Andy should do it this year.” Wallace said “Oh, don’t know about that...” and there was a bit of a discussion, then Wallace said, “You’d better leave the room, Andy.” So I had to sit outside in the chair while a committee decided whether we were going to ask me or the Eric Delves or the Nick Cuthberts. Then the decision was made that I was going to do it.<sup>29</sup>

Being entrusted with the responsibility, despite his peripheral status, was highly significant for Hawthorne’s pulpit journey. As has been affirmed before about situated learning, moving through professional relationships and acting in different parts of the learning context are not just the place for learning, they are learning.

Good learning is founded on ‘reflection in action’<sup>30</sup> and the mentor-practitioner relationship is clearly an effective way to stimulate this. Andy Hawthorne wrote about Wallace Benn’s influence around the same time in his life:

I would preach it then afterwards he’d pick holes in it at the end, then and there. He would always do feedback, but in an incredible spirit of encouragement.<sup>31</sup>

Mentoring that has been valuable to our writers seems to have been marked by personal interaction imbued with qualities of encouragement and trust, which seeks to build the confidence of the learner and which occurs in the context of practice and reflection on practice. The writers were not more enthusiastic about any other aspect of their formative influences. The importance of mentoring can probably not be overestimated. Roger Forster concluded his essay with the following words: “Thank you all my mentors: I cannot tell you what I owe you all.”<sup>32</sup>

### ***Extending the community of practice***

Our final discussion of the *Pulpit Journeys* material focuses on the way in which the writers refer to formative and learning influences that derive from the institution and culture in which preaching is practiced, both as practitioners themselves and often earlier in their lives when they were growing up. Susan Durber wrote,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, p. 49ff.

<sup>31</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 140.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

I longed to join the guild of male preachers and to take on their styles, just as I knew that I should one day wear a Geneva gown and the plain white tabs of a preacher.<sup>33</sup>

Here the external signs of membership are symbolic of her childhood aspiration to be a preacher, and it is so powerful that she is able to overlook the anomaly that existed in the fact that there were at that time no female preachers. Others point to the power of the collective memory and the honouring of preachers by church, and even by society. Richard Bewes, recalling church landmarks where great British preachers have preached reminds the reader, “There are shrines everywhere for those who know their spiritual history”<sup>34</sup> and Roger Forster enthused at the end of his essay, “I pray that those of my readers who aspire to proclaim the Word will be as blessed as I have been, in being part of such a glorious company of the preachers (Psalm 68:11).”<sup>35</sup>

This honouring of tradition is more explicitly related to learning preaching by Rob Frost: “Methodist history has undoubtedly shaped my view of preaching and my view of the preacher as, essentially, a storyteller!”<sup>36</sup> He also wrote “I’ve been greatly influenced by my Methodist heritage of ‘open air meetings’...”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Professor of New Testament Jimmy Dunn noted,

Being brought up and trained in the Reformed (Church of Scotland) tradition, I inherited a very high appreciation of the place and role of the sermon in a worship service. In typically Reformed architecture, the pulpit is central and stands above the communion table – the Word above the Sacrament, the Sacrament as the Word made visible. And typically in traditional Reformed worship the sermon functions as the climax of the service, with only the concluding hymn and benediction to follow.<sup>38</sup>

Dunn notes that while he was in Scotland this was the practice that he followed. However when he moved to England in 1970, and began preaching as a Methodist Local Preacher, his methods changed:

Quite quickly I began to see value in a different order of service, where the sermon was more at the centre, and where offering,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52.

intercessions (and church notices!) could serve as some kind of (congregational) response to the Word.<sup>39</sup>

The community of practice, interpreted in this case as the locus for a range of activities connected to the core competency<sup>40</sup> of preaching, exerts a powerful effect on the student Joel Edwards:

Brought up in the spiritual womb of Black Pentecostalism I had enjoyed the security of a vibrant and dynamic Christian faith. Sunday school, youth meetings and choirs and guitar-strumming all came with the package.<sup>41</sup>

This is echoed by another black writer:

I am an African Caribbean Black male in his 41st year. I was born into and have been socialised within a Caribbean home of Jamaican migrants to Britain. I have chosen to give you these bare facts by way of an introduction because to understand my approach, commitment to and dare one say, sheer enjoyment of preaching, one needs to understand something of the context into which I was nurtured.<sup>42</sup>

This is explicit recognition by the writer of the degree to which his preaching development can only be understood by referring to the *habitus* where his models and mentors exercised their preaching.

Jimmy Dunn also notes the connection between his current practice and the church tradition in which he served:

My Reformed inheritance also taught me the importance of the sermon as a means of teaching the congregation.<sup>43</sup>

It cannot perhaps be overstated how much learning to preach involves gaining an understanding from the practice of a particular community of what is, and what is not a proper sermon, and what the purpose and shape of preaching is or should be.

### **‘Intuitive training’**

How might these indirect influences be assimilated in the development and growth of the preacher? The old if simplistic dualism of ‘caught rather than taught’ was implicit in many writings, and explicit in Susan Durber’s account of her own training in which she notes “little overt reflection on the task of preaching.” Instead, “Preaching

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> I use the term ‘core competency’ to refer to the place of preaching in the minister’s calling primarily because it is at the centre of this examination.

<sup>41</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 52.



was imagined ... to be an almost natural process, caught rather than taught.”<sup>44</sup> Joel Edwards referred to this as “intuitive training” in his description of the church life of his childhood:

And I grew up in a tradition with a high level of intuitive training. .. every Black Pentecostal church of the time had an intuitive culture in which ordinary people were enabled and allowed to develop public gifts. It ranged from the simple disciplines of learning to handle the Bible in a Sunday school class, to teaching a Sunday school class, leading the entire congregation in worship or preaching the Sunday sermon at frighteningly short notice! The results weren’t always brilliant, but most of us felt useful as a result.<sup>45</sup>

‘Intuitive training’ here expresses very well the learning of peripheral members who are situated legitimately within a community of practice. Here it also seems to encompass being given responsibility before demonstrating competence. The writer also refers to a sense that many of the community were engaged in one way or another with being trained ‘intuitively’. The word ‘intuitive’ reflects forms of ‘tacit knowing’ that here accompany what might be termed non-interventionist training situations.<sup>46</sup>

Leslie Griffiths identifies a more generalised educational effect from growing up within a culture of preaching that went beyond individual practitioners and that he called, “a cultural matrix, a homiletic tradition, that surrounded me and infused my whole being in the tender years of my youth.”<sup>47</sup> Here he describes the atmosphere with several vivid examples of how it operated:

... it wasn’t so much the people who performed the task of preaching that stand out. It was more a matter of the very air I breathed in those distant days. The hills were alive, if I may pervert a familiar jingle, with the sounds of preaching. ... The village where I grew up had 5,000 souls. Its streets were littered with chapels. Each was crafted, with various degrees of finery, around its pulpit. Here, in English or Welsh, the mighty orators of the day would pronounce. I grew up surrounded by this phenomenon.... At school, I’d hear fellow pupils discussing the previous evening’s sermon. The local newspaper carried reports of what had been said. So much of our communal life was suffused with preaching, reports of preaching, the anticipation of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>46</sup> Tacit knowledge is discussed in ch. 2 on p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 125.

preaching, reflection on preaching, and a discussion of the virtues of preaching.<sup>48</sup>

This richly poetic description of context seems to go far beyond a community of practice identified as practitioners composed of peers and masters. The recipients or hearers of the sermons provide a kind of multi-dimensional feedback loop for preachers, rich in moulding and shaping influences for the preacher and for any who like the author is imbibing those influences and having his understanding of preaching shaped long before coming into a pulpit himself.

## Negative influences

It is illuminating to examine the situation where a discord or struggle is expressed in a preachers' perceptions of their formative influences, and how they are related to the communities of practice of which they were part. Methodist Anthony Reddie, describing himself as an "African Caribbean Black male in his forty-second year" wrote:

I was unable to reconcile the generic perceptions of being a preacher, which I gained from being on the approved national training course for the development of preachers, with the more specific skills I had learnt from my parents, neither of whom (at that time) were called to preach. My preaching was largely formulaic and lacking in any distinctiveness as a result of my trying to become a 'good White middle class Methodist Local Preacher'. My preaching was nondescript because I was denying my formative roots and the compelling, narrative strength that is Black orality.<sup>49</sup>

It would of course be unwarranted to build a negative appraisal of said "approved national training course" based on this one testimony. More significant is the recognition for this preacher of the importance of early influences, even when these influences were not specifically located in acts of preaching. He writes of a kind of cognitive dissonance that was not resolved for a number of years. Perhaps it is only hindsight that enables him to assess his early preaching, but he is quite specific about factors contributing to, or missing from his preaching:

The underlying 'problem' with the early years of my preaching ministry was the lack of awareness of the contextual or cultural elements in my life which could and should have served as a basic foundation for proclamation the gospel. All the aforementioned factors, arising from my upbringing, to which mention has been made, such as my parents' narrative skills or

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

incorporation of scripture into the very fabric of the mundane and the ordinary; all these factors were sadly missing in my preaching.<sup>50</sup>

Further on the same author describes an experiment in preaching in which he tries to incorporate the radical adult education techniques of Thomas Groome into a sermon slot.<sup>51</sup> This leads him to what he calls an “interactive, extemporised approach to preaching.” He delightedly discovers that he has an ability absorbed from his family background and that he believes feeds into and enables the resulting preaching style:

The most remarkable piece of learning that emerged from that poignant moment in 1995 was the sense that I had reconnected with my formative roots within the Black African/ Caribbean tradition. ... All the comedic and performance skills I had witnessed in my parents, and which had lain dormant in me for many years, suddenly came to life. I revelled in the seeming unstructured nature of it all. My brain was running at a hundred miles an hour, always three steps ahead of the congregation, creating a structure as I went along. I could see the script in my head and I was in control.<sup>52</sup>

His reflection on practice includes a high level of awareness of process and the mental constructs with which he was operating. He continues:

The sermon that arose from the exercise was a drawing together of all the threads that had arisen in the exercise. I was able to respond to the various points different participants had made during the exercise and throw in the odd aside as it occurred to me in that sudden flash of a moment. I was able to move from the main narrative thread of reflections, make apparently obtuse observations and then return to the central message without deviation, repetition or hesitation. In effect, I had become like my parents. I had imbibed their wisdom and learnt from their experience and practice and not realised it – until that moment.<sup>53</sup>

When preaching problems were resolved for him, through the development of this approach that he describes as ‘improvisational’, he paid specific homage to his family background and cultural heritage:

I am deeply conscious and proud of the heritage into which I have been nurtured and socialised, and the way in which those resources now inform and influence my approach to preaching.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> See Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry; the Way of Shared Praxis*.

<sup>52</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-160.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

## Congregational influence

Such a heritage as Reddie refers to exists for many preachers quite specifically and actively in the experience of preaching before a church congregation Sunday by Sunday. The congregation, with their collective memory, upholding of traditions, and individual histories that connect with the history of the institution in remarkably ‘thick’ ways,<sup>55</sup> are shapers of the preacher. Methodist minister David Wilkinson wrote:

... over years of preaching to the same congregation, they feed you so much. You think through sermons in relation to the real people you know will be there. An encouraging congregation who are hungry to hear God’s word is a great privilege.<sup>56</sup>

The needs and desires of the congregation are often consciously present to the preacher and pastor who knows the people who will hear the sermon being prepared. This preacher writes of going beyond directly shaping the message to please or serve people, for he is conscious of handling the word of God in the sermon. The people have a relationship with a God who speaks, and the preacher enters into that relationship almost as a kind of mouthpiece or amanuensis for the words of God being spoken or given to the people assembled for worship. Wilkinson continues:

I therefore owe a great deal to Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church in Liverpool where I was their minister, because they taught me how to preach. I remember the businessman who, after what I thought was a great sermon on love, asked me how he was going to show love to the people he had been forced to make redundant in order to save the business.<sup>57</sup>

A preacher who seeks to be an effective communicator by listening to the listeners will have their technique and understanding shaped. For Anglican minister Mike Breen the experience happened outside of regular church-based worship:

I was given the responsibility of the youth and community centre ... and here again I was challenged to find a way of communicating the gospel in a method that the young people could understand.... We would use contemporary music to highlight the questions that so often were in the minds of the young people, drama and storytelling to explore those questions, and simple direct ‘gospel bullets’ to call people to a response. This like many other experiences of seeking to engage with a

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<sup>55</sup> Leading to sometimes powerful reactionary and conservative tendencies, as many leaders who have proposed changes to congregational or liturgical practice will testify.

<sup>56</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*, p. 185.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

culture unfamiliar with Christian teaching continued to fashion my understanding of what it is to preach.<sup>58</sup>

Note Anthony Reddie's connection with the congregation in the following observation about black preaching:

Within Black oral traditions there exists a togetherness and a connectedness between the main or principle speaker and the wider audience or congregation. The meaning and truth of any encounter does not reside solely with the speaker nor does it lie with the audience. The speaker is not an active force and the congregation or audience a passive one. Conversely, there is an ongoing process of negotiation between the principle speaker and those who are in attendance. The congregation or audience are an active force. Their engagement with the preacher is integral to the successful enactment of the sermon.<sup>59</sup>

This understanding of black preaching goes beyond 'congregational context' as a learning element and speaks of the community of practice in which the preacher's relationship with the community (within the purview of the sermon) is formative and profound. Such an interactive quality to the preaching is not solely the preserve of the vocal 'call and response' in many Black preaching traditions. Jimmy Dunn writes of a sensitivity developed to increase the communication potential of the sermon:

I soon realised that I needed to maintain eye-contact with the worshipping congregation. A sense of rapport with the congregation (or lecture audience) always has been of major importance for me. I need to be sensitive to how (or whether) the congregation/audience is hearing what I am trying to say. Such sensitivity enables me to vary pace and tone and volume, to react appropriately when the congregation/audience is with me or is obviously not, to insert a clarificatory addition, or repeat a point, or abbreviate a longer section, or to throw in a humorous aside, and so on.<sup>60</sup>

For many of these writers, their preaching has been shaped by the congregations and contexts for their preaching. This is far more complex than 'learning on the job', for it presupposes and requires what might be called 'communicational intelligence' that listens to listeners before, during and after the preaching event.<sup>61</sup> The listeners with

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> This is so named after Malcolm Knowles' work, but communicational intelligence is not part of his list as discussed in ch. 2. Nor has it been in any way empirically established. However, I introduce the phrase to serve in a less rigorous, more informal way to point up the existence of an ability or talent to work with literate ability, emotional awareness, and social sensitivity to create or co-create meaningful dialogue and exchanges that we call communication. For a discussion of this from a

their preacher(s) thus form a community that brings its own traditions and understandings of preaching, and expects its preachers to adapt and conform to those traditions, even while it allows itself to be taught, challenged and occasionally even surprised by the preachers.

## **Conclusion**

The preachers writing for the book used in this study exhibited a high degree of self-awareness and an ability to reflect on their development as preachers and the formative influences in this process. Calling and vocation is one aspect of their ‘pulpit journeys’ in which God is understood to be able to direct and to motivate them through inner compulsion and/or a dramatic and passionate sense of urgency about their task. This provides for ‘intrinsic motivation’ to learn that is possibly without parallel in self-directed adult learning, and which as attested by these writers, has been fundamental to their lifetime journeys as preachers.<sup>62</sup> The process of learning to preach is seen by many of them to take place within what I suggest are vital, functional communities of practice. These are the preaching cultures, past and present, in which role models, mentors, church tradition and hearers have a series of deep and lasting impacts on the learner.

While the influence of active mentors was well described by a minority, there was almost no mention of the involvement of others with the educational progress of the preachers, neither in the form of other preachers as peers, nor in the form of training either sought out or provided by religious institutions. The benefits possible from a mentor were rarely planned or seen as a given within ministerial training. The ‘pulpit journeys’ of many of these writers sound for the most part like fairly lonely and solitary affairs. At the same time there was ample recognition of indirect influences coming from the church cultures where they ministered and in which some of them grew up, and this needs to be better understood and the subject of reflection by learners who wish to build consciously on what is available to them from their past and their present.

Before finally moving to consider in my conclusion how such learning experiences might more specifically be enhanced, encouraged or enabled, I will in the next chapter consider my last field study, a series of semi-structured interviews with twelve young Methodist preachers.

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Christian perspective and with reference to social culture and also the mass media see Schultze, *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*.

<sup>62</sup> I discuss intrinsic motivation in ch. 2, p. 52, footnote 65, and in ch. 6, page 121.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Field Study 3: Liverpool Methodist Preachers**

#### ***Introduction***

In the last of my three field studies I examine the data drawn from my semi-structured interviews with twelve Methodist preachers who were members of or closely involved with Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church and / or the associated Chaplaincy at Liverpool University. I begin this chapter with a consideration of my initial interview with the minister and University Chaplain at the time, Rev. Dr David Wilkinson, and discuss his view of modelling good practice and mentoring younger preachers. I then look at how role models contribute to the learning and development of the preacher, before turning to mentors as they have been experienced by the interviewee. Finally I discuss other more minor educational influences, before a consideration of how these preachers have been influenced by a community of practice.

#### ***Interview with David Wilkinson***

Before turning to an analysis of the preachers' interviews, it is worth looking at the understanding and reflections on the period that may be seen in an interview with Wilkinson. The first interview was conducted in July 2006, before any other interviews had taken place.

Certainly in practice as well as in conversation, Wilkinson privileges preaching as a ministerial vocation. He said,

I think I was called first and foremost to be a preacher and to be an evangelist within ministry so it was always very important for me. But it had to be seen in the context of the overall picture which was about creating conditions for growth in a church, pastoring people, particularly at a formative stage of life, and a real sense of ministry happening in lots of different ways.<sup>1</sup>

His intention was not to produce clones of himself, but to encourage and enable the full range of ministries needed in the local church. Moreover he stated that he was not involved directly in mentoring or training preachers. These were and are functions of the Methodist system of putting people On Note and On Trial as a way of testing their call and developing their ministry of preaching and leading worship. At the same time, all the interview subjects who were preaching or who progressed

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<sup>1</sup>David Wilkinson, *Interview About Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church*, (2006).

to preaching ministry undertook some form of the Methodist Local Preachers Training scheme, and so their learning had that structure as a minimum.

Wilkinson's impact as a role model will be seen as significant for a number of the interviewees. He said:

I think one of the values was that I did believe that you had to model preaching in order for it to be learnt. And that's what I saw as my major responsibility. So rather than explicit teaching [about preaching], I actually had to model preaching but also I had to model a way of affirming the diversity of preaching so that what they got was not a sense of feeling that they had to preach like me.<sup>2</sup>

In his leadership capacity, therefore, Wilkinson recognised the potential for modelling his own beliefs, attitudes and approaches to preaching. His advocacy for the diversity of preaching, by allowing other preachers to contribute and by affirming their work, is a much more deliberate policy. It is also one that is implemented more easily within the Methodist structure of local church practice whereby worship services frequently make use of visiting Circuit preachers. When sharing his pulpit with the trainee preachers, there is another kind of encouragement Wilkinson was aiming to give:

Now the second modelling value was a kind of complete confidence in people whoever they were, that if they'd been called by God in the Spirit, it didn't matter whether they were female, it didn't matter whether they were young, it didn't matter whether they were off the wall evangelical, it didn't matter whether they were far more liberal than I was happy with, but my role as minister was to give them confidence, to actually say effectively, "you can do this, I believe in you." Now that was true of ministry across the board, not just preaching.<sup>3</sup>

As we look at the trainee preachers' testimonials we will see how much confidence some think they were given by this strategy and by Wilkinson's attitude to modelling good practice. In particular I will be maintaining that such confidence derives from the legitimating dynamic of being given responsibility, essential to learning in a community of practice.

### ***Vocation and calling***

The call to preach is part of a particular discourse of the Methodist Church, but shares much of its language and theology with traditional ideas of lay and ordained

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



calling in the Western Protestant church. Calling as primarily an interior experience is a relatively recent phenomenon in the process of church ministry and ordination.<sup>4</sup> An equally important aspect is the outer urging of the church, through its representatives (and this may be interpreted very freely indeed to include fellow church members as well as authority figures). This exterior calling may take into account certain necessary conditions that can support the call. In the case of preaching, these are most obviously an ability to speak, and an understanding of a message to proclaim, although in the history of Christian preachers there are exceptions to this as to every rule. I have already written in the Introduction about some of the characteristics that have been considered necessary for the preacher.

Additionally, and crucially in some traditions, there is valued the existence of an inner desire or compulsion to preach and to proclaim the Christian gospel. In keeping with Methodist theology and the importance John Wesley attached to feelings of assurance and experience, vocation is typically a spiritual and emotional event for the potential minister as well as for the new convert.<sup>5</sup> According to Wilkinson at Elm Hall Drive Church (hereafter to be abbreviated as EHD), a young preacher would be asked, “Did it feel right, with all of the nervousness, even if you got it completely wrong in terms of what you actually said? Was there an inner sense of the Spirit

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<sup>4</sup> Scriptural references often used in a typology of vocation include 1 Samuel 3, the calling of the young Samuel independently of the ‘institutional church’, and the seven men chosen in Acts 6 being described, before their selection and laying on of hands, as being full of the Holy Spirit. This latter text may have contributed to Cranmer’s first question to be asked of candidates to the diaconate, “Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and Ministration?” The rise of the concept of internal vocation was subsequent to this, as charted in H. J. M. Turner, *Ordination and Vocation: Yesterday and Today: Current Questions About Ministries in the Light of Theology and History* (Worthing: Churchman Publishing, 1990). Further, Demond notes the particular emphasis on ‘the call’ to preach in African-American homiletics, in Demond, ‘Teaching Preaching’, p. 44. He cites William H. Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No: Rethinking the African-American Call to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994). A further resource for empirical research on calling of some late twentieth-century evangelical UK preachers may be found in England, ed., *My Call to Preach*.

<sup>5</sup> On personal assurance and Methodism a principal and traditional reference is Wesley’s own famous words on his ‘Aldersgate experience’ conversion: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even MINE, and saved ME from the law of sin and death.” According to Maldwyn L. Edwards, President of the British Methodist Conference, 1961-1962, this experience “was the source of Methodist teaching on salvation, assurance, and holiness. It was the watershed of Wesley’s whole career and it gave him charter and compass for a course from which he never deviated. Even more, it gave him the spiritual energy for his pilgrim’s progress, so that never again was he Christian with a burden on his back. Until his dying day Wesley dated his experience, his message, and his doctrine back to this date of 1738.” Wesley in one of his own sermons written for publication said “assurance of faith which these (believers) enjoy excludes all doubt and fear, it excludes all kinds of doubt and fear concerning their future perseverance; though it is not properly, as was said before, an assurance of what is future, but only of what now is.” (Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872).

actually working through you?”<sup>6</sup> It was the responsibility of the church to test, to question, and to determine the validity of this call, but ‘the call’ had to be there in the first place.

This sense of vocation is discussed here partly to flag its significance as a motivation for learning, as I have noted earlier. The more important issue for this thesis is the effect and interaction of the group with regard to their learning and development as preachers, rather than solely their call. My focus has been on what in the ‘community of practice’ (as discussed in chapter 4) may have contributed to or hindered the learner-preacher’s call to preach, specifically the effect of role models, practice models and mentors drawn from experienced preachers as well as from peers or those perceived to be at a similar level as learner-preachers.

## Calling and role models

Most interviewees seemed only moderately self-aware and reflective on the influence of role models on their calling to the ministry and / or to preaching. Fewer than half could remember with admiration or approval figures other than Wilkinson who preached well and who preached ‘significantly’ (and who were, in other words, instrumental in the spiritual growth or formation of the interviewee). Thus G\_\_\_, a male minister in his twenties at the time:

...to arrive at Elm Hall Drive with David being minister ... and so, you know, consistent, good quality preaching that I found challenging, that I found, you know, helped me to grow as a Christian, that helped me to relate faith to everyday life. (This) was a good model for me and continues to be.<sup>7</sup>

The call to preach is associated for this person with seeing its importance and significance, seeing it done well and done effectively:

I think the experience during my year at Cliff College, the weekly class meetings at which the tutors preached ... was a forming experience, and being on mission and hearing the evangelists preach, preaching for a response, was something I don’t think I’d experienced that as part of my home church, actually seeing the sermon having an immediate effect in people’s response... (It was) important in terms of seeing preaching as something important and worthwhile and that God could use in that way...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson, *Interview About Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church*.

<sup>7</sup> FS3 Interview 01.

<sup>8</sup> FS3 Interview 01.

The respondent was indicating that a significant part of his formation as a preacher lay in the way his understanding of the importance of and potential for preaching in the life of the church, developed particularly through observing it done in missional situations. The respondent is also highlighting a very positive outcome of intentional training that is carried out in practice and not only in theoretical constructs.

Almost all interviewees commented positively on the preaching of Dr Wilkinson at the time of their association with Elm Hall Drive Church, but few tended to see him (in his preaching role) as directly instrumental in their call to preach. S\_\_\_, now an Anglican minister, then in her early twenties recalls a fairly minimal effect:

There was very good preaching at the time and David was an excellent preacher, and the other lay preachers in the circuit were pretty good. But I don't remember there being anything striking about it other than the ... niggling thought that I probably ought to be doing it and didn't want to be.<sup>9</sup>

While recognising good preaching, the respondent does not think that she had a strong sense of aspiring to do the same. Her call to preach was experienced as something of a moral conviction at the level of her conscience. Another spoke of the conflicting effects of good preaching on vocation to preach:

I think listening to someone who is undoubtedly an extraordinarily gifted preacher actually has... [hesitation]... makes me feel two things really: One would be, the kind of, "I wish I could preach like so-and-so" and the other would be "I could never preach like so-and-so." In one way motivating, in terms of emulating that person and be like that person and on the other hand, certainly I think when I was beginning preaching, thinking well I could never be like that so, almost perhaps "I am not called to preach because I could never be as good as so-and-so."<sup>10</sup>

This speaker seems to have overcome the feelings of inadequacy and the net product of her reactions has been the feeling of admiration of the preacher's role and the establishment of qualitative standards for preaching. Another speaker observed how high the bar was set, as it were, for preaching well:

Preaching at Elm Hall Drive was high quality, you know, the people who were good were good, really good. The other preachers who came from around the circuit, it was obvious that they were of a different calibre really and you know, I didn't want to do it if I couldn't do it well, there was no point in

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<sup>9</sup> FS3 Interview 10.

<sup>10</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

preaching unless you can preach really, really well, really properly I suppose.<sup>11</sup>

The ‘other preachers’ were not seen as being of the same quality as Dr Wilkinson and those working with him. What this person saw as high quality preaching was shaping her technical aspirations, that is, how she wanted to do it. It is arguable that it helped shape as well her sense of who she wanted to be, in the sense of a competent and perhaps respected or acknowledged practitioner, although this was unsaid.

These remarks on calling begin to demonstrate the formative influence of role models on the subjects’ approach to and understanding of preaching (as distinct from their early calling), and I will come back to this in a section on development.

### **Calling and peer models**

Another significant factor in considering a call to preach was the effect of seeing peers doing it. Most subjects stated or gave the impression that much Methodist local preaching is practised by elderly men and women. This is incontestably borne out by present experience in Methodist churches up and down the country. That this was perceived as a disincentive to consider preaching as a valid vocation is highlighted by several of the participants in the research. We hear about the cultural discontinuity represented by the difference in ages within a Local Preachers meeting, and the extra challenge this presents to young preachers who often have a younger person’s need to fit in and feel a part of the group. This female minister who was in her twenties when at EHD said:

When I moved to Milton Keynes I was the only person in my age group in the Local Preachers meeting, in fact I was the youngest person in the Local Preachers meeting by about twenty-five years. So that was quite a big shock to the system really.<sup>12</sup>

The respondent had moved from a community of practice where there were other practitioners of the same gender and similar ages, to one where she felt less able to fit into the cultural context. The age of the role model had a bearing on the aspiration and self-identification of a number of respondents. One interviewee, male and in his twenties at that time, was struck by the age disparity between the Local Preachers at the previous church he attended and those at EHD. He noted that significant vocational influences for him at EHD were:

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<sup>11</sup> FS3 Interview 12.

<sup>12</sup> FS3 Interview 02.

...seeing preaching modelled and people being mentored. I hadn't had that at the church where I'd been at before. There weren't any people that I knew of who were Local Preachers, I mean, not people my age. So before I was at Elm Hall Drive that idea of Local Preaching wasn't in my consciousness at all.<sup>13</sup>

Some communities of practice in Lave and Wenger's study displayed a wide age spread between the novice and the accomplished professional, but this aspect was notably missing from the communities of practice at EHD as experienced by another respondent, a male in his late teens when there. Here he reflects the vital importance of patterning or aspiring after those of similar age and background:

If you are a school teacher in your forties, it seems like a very obvious thing to do, to become a Local Preacher, but if you are at school and sixteen, it's not really... I know there certainly was a fair bit of scandal going on about my doing it at age fifteen/sixteen...<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, the setting of example and providing peer role models was a strong and necessary (if not sufficient) condition for several of these subjects to consider preaching.

The person preaching was a younger person so I thought "why not? If he can do it then I can do it, maybe..."<sup>15</sup>

The same interviewee remarked that Wilkinson's ability and age were significant for their own call:

Obviously David is a very, very good contextual preacher, and he was a young man, so it certainly put into my mind that it was possible for a younger person to be a preacher within the Methodist Church.<sup>16</sup>

Another explicitly recognised the importance to their calling of seeing others involved and ministering:

That time I was a student, I was in the Methodist Society and involved at Elm Hall Drive and my call to preach there developed out of lots of other people who were my age getting involved in local preaching.<sup>17</sup>

Finally another male, in his teens at the time, reflected on the impact on others of his beginning to preach.

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<sup>13</sup> FS3 Interview 07.

<sup>14</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>15</sup> FS3 Interview 02.

<sup>16</sup> FS3 Interview 02.

<sup>17</sup> FS3 Interview 07.

I think J\_\_ and I starting [preaching] opened up the possibilities for other younger people doing it.<sup>18</sup>

These subjects are expressing the value, in terms of positive encouragement to pursue preaching training and accreditation, of being able to imagine themselves in the same activity as other practitioners of the same or similar age and stage in life. There are many stages in the journey to this form of public ministry, and early on the development of a sense of self-identity, i.e. as one *who could be capable* of doing the job, is important to this group of preachers.

For several of the women, but by no means all, the existence of models of the same gender was important:<sup>19</sup>

...the fact that there were young-ish female preachers around, the likes of K\_\_ , and A\_\_ , actually did help me see that ... it could be done, especially that you didn't have to be a man, and you didn't necessarily have to preach like a man.<sup>20</sup>

However, I need to point out that this was not widely or frequently affirmed, even in reply to specific questions in my interview schedule about same-gender role models.

Another, S\_\_ , was less certain that the effect of peers was explicit and maintained that, as far as providing positive role models at the stage of calling is concerned, there was not an explicit or openly shared discourse of comparing and evaluating one another's callings and gifts:

The MethSoc was very vibrant at the time, there was a lot of activity, it was well organised, well led and I think that had the effect of encouraging people in their own faith, which ultimately then led to a whole number of callings. But at the time, we didn't really look around and say, oh such and such has obviously got a calling, or such and such.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, as this next subject explained, the social environment has a highly significant effect on the development of calling for individuals emotionally involved in that community. K\_\_ , a female now an ordained Methodist minister and then in her thirties explained:

I think Elm Hall Drive was a very encouraging environment. I think the combination of the Church and the Chaplaincy helped that because they actually had quite a long history of people

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<sup>18</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>19</sup> The impact of gender on modelling and mentoring also arises in the field study of Church of Scotland ministers. Although it is not in the foreground of this thesis, it demonstrates the need for further research in gender studies.

<sup>20</sup> FS3 Interview 04.

<sup>21</sup> FS3 Interview 10.

being called to preach and actually being called to the ministry at Elm Hall Drive over quite a few years and quite a number of younger adults who had been at the Chaplaincy had stayed on in Liverpool, getting jobs or whatever.<sup>22</sup>

The ethos and atmosphere of the community of practice had persisted for a number of years, allowing individuals to progress through the community as part of their own journeys towards ministry. She continued:

...which meant there was quite a large peer group and others who were actively involved in the life of the church even if they weren't specifically preaching at the time. Which meant there was a lot of support and encouragement to explore your gifts, I suppose, in a wider sense than just preaching...<sup>23</sup>

She also experienced a change of perception that others referred to regarding the appropriate age for a preacher:

I think in a sense I suppose didn't feel isolated or that I was odd in pursuing that, because there were others within a wider peer group that were also exploring it at the time, which perhaps gave myself and others the kind of courage to think, "well maybe I can pursue this call and I'm not going to be told that I'm too young, or that I'm not good enough or whatever."<sup>24</sup>

She concludes with her observation:

... I think that was generally a very encouraging atmosphere for people to explore their call.<sup>25</sup>

### **Disincentives to vocation**

This 'culture of calling' at Elm Hall Drive Church had a counter effect for some, in particular, who were wary of being drawn to it simply or primarily because others were doing it. A female, now ordained, and then in her twenties, spoke of a inclination to disregard a preaching vocation:

And I didn't want everyone to go, "ooh, everyone is starting preaching" so for that reason I kind of I was almost fighting against what I actually think I knew God was calling me to do – so the easiest response was to go the other way.<sup>26</sup>

This disincentive was also referred to by T\_\_:

I think that I can understand people probably feeling that they didn't want to say they had a call to preach if they were going to

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<sup>22</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>23</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>24</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>25</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>26</sup> FS3 Interview 04.

be seen to be jumping on a bandwagon, but the fact that a couple of us had been open to calling and in not the easiest of circumstances meant that those people who were feeling a call had people that they could talk to.<sup>27</sup>

As I mentioned in chapter 5, Wilkinson was at the time aware of this and stated that it featured in the counselling and guidance given to some of the people coming forward to test a call. Moreover as he said there were systems already in place for people to test and discern the call to preach. Wilkinson spoke about this:

Well, I think we gently tried to dissuade a few, but my recollection is that one of the principles that we used was that even those for whom we weren't too sure whether the call was genuine, part of the recognising of the call was to try it out. So that only as they became part of the process of study and preaching and learning could you actually make an assessment both as a church and for them whether the call was real or not. And that's deeply embedded within Methodist practice of course in terms of the On Note and On Trial system. So the structure was already there to do that.<sup>28</sup>

Wilkinson emphasises the 'situatedness' of both the learning and the assessment of a valid call. Only by participating on the margins of the institution can a good estimation be made of whether the student can and should be encouraged to progress and participate in more significant and legitimated ways.

### **An intentional climate of encouragement**

Returning to the climate that fostered vocation, or out of which young people began to offer themselves, it should be noted that such a climate did not occur by chance.<sup>29</sup> The movement of young people from being passive to active participants in church programmes was the product of leadership decisions, church policy and pastoral style. T\_\_, a male in his teens at the time, observed,

G\_\_ was very supportive during the period and T\_\_ his wife, during the question of whether this is a call, and were very open to the idea that young people could be involved in preaching and worship leading. Their fostering of youth services allowed people the opportunity to explore the chance of preaching or at least being involved in worship leading (probably not preaching), but of being involved in leading intercessions or sections of worship.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>28</sup> Wilkinson, *Interview About Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church*.

<sup>29</sup> Nor, as we have observed elsewhere, will a strictly theological explanation suffice for our purposes here.

<sup>30</sup> FS3 Interview 09.



A nascent form of legitimate peripheral participation enabled the young people to engage practically in some functions of leadership, as well as to have an acknowledgement or a legitimating of their role, however temporary or experimental. Another spoke of the culture or atmosphere as being supportive of and encouraging to individuals thinking about serving the church.

I think there was a kind of a culture where people were being encouraged to think about their gifts, and people were particularly – with preaching gifts – people were being encouraged to do that, so lots of my peer group were exploring that and so as part of that I was watching other people use their gifts and try those things out. And I felt for a while that God was asking me to do that... So my call sort of developed within that, seeing other people who were my sort of peer group exploring it.<sup>31</sup>

P\_\_\_, a male in his thirties at the time, noted:

I think when we were at Liverpool I met with one or two people who were preaching themselves, or who were exploring a call to preach in a group. Again David was instrumental in enabling that group to meet.<sup>32</sup>

The call to preach, like the enterprise of preaching itself, has a strongly individual quality, and these excerpts are not intended to support an argument that calling may be viewed entirely in social terms. The narratives of calling trace many internal struggles and are marked by much private prayer seeking God's will and guidance. What I have tried to do here is to highlight the ways in which God's will and guidance may be expressed through the acknowledged effect of and interaction with others. We will see shortly that the climate of encouragement as fostered by leaders and expressed quite often through peer relationships fits well with theories of communities of practice that were discussed in chapter 4.

Turning to the development of the preacher, engaged in what is in part (but not entirely) a public activity, the effect of others on this development is traceable. Here I will explore how having a peer group influenced the development of preachers, beyond their calling.

### ***Peer models***

The mutual support and encouragement of peers in their learning processes was quite often mentioned as an active educational influence. T\_\_\_, a male in his teens at the

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<sup>31</sup> FS3 Interview 07.

<sup>32</sup> FS3 Interview 08.

time, noted with particular enthusiasm the importance of peers in his preaching development:

J\_\_ was a good friend through it all, as someone who started preaching not long after me, within a couple of Preachers Meetings I think. That was a good friendship to have, alongside being generally decent friends, to have that preaching dimension. We would both listen to each other and go to each other's services and again have quite different styles of doing things...<sup>33</sup>

Peer-assisted learning does not always require an imitative approach to learning as discussed in chapter 3. The same respondent spoke of other peer relationships that he developed, and the help and encouragement provided by these preachers.

(It was) through a Rob Frost mission that I got to meet – and through Cliff College – I got to meet a lot of different preachers. There was a guy called N\_\_ from Stoke,... and L\_\_, they were both my exact contemporaries and they started preaching not long ago after I began. That was important.<sup>34</sup>

Here the speaker affirmed the value of identification with others of close age and similar stage and engaged in the same enterprise. He continued with an explanation of the affective aspects of that identification:

We'd write to each other and catch up at different events. I think it was good not to feel alone in all that... I think that it was good to have other people who felt those similar sorts of pressures and having to go through 'A' levels alongside *Faith and Worship* units and those kinds of things.<sup>35</sup>

The positive effect of this peer relationship in the mind of the speaker encompasses companionship, mutually assisted reflection on practice, some role modelling (albeit in a comparative way, as revealed in the phrase “different styles of doing things,”) and chiefly the encouragement provided by interaction with those felt to be similar in outlook, age, and experiences. Such enthusiasm for learning that leads to independent study through peer reflection and review looks like every educationalist's dream.

Peer assisted learning takes practical form as well of course. A pattern of peer assistance that was initiated for another subject in her Anglican training course continues to the present, several years after ordination:

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<sup>33</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>34</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>35</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

I send my stuff to friends and I get other things back. So a friend of mine has just sent me their midnight service for Christmas Eve that they preached last year. And I'm going to use that when I start to formulate my ideas about our Christmas Eve service this year. So we have quite a good sharing mechanism through our cell groups, our college cells.<sup>36</sup>

Still, at least half of the interview subjects struggled to recall significant relationships in this sphere, although there was acknowledgement that there were probably passive relationships that contributed. One other subject noted:

And then I think I suppose the peer group aspect of that would be being able to share in study with others...<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps an intellectual rather than strongly felt or experienced assent to peer learning was being expressed here. Another said,

...and there were a number of younger preachers ... across a reasonable theological spectrum which meant ... there were people you could look at and say “yeah, OK there are different ways of doing it...”<sup>38</sup>

Learning about different ways of preaching, rather than being impressed or imprinted by a senior mentor's particular way, is here a feature of this respondent's understanding of peer learning. The “different ways of doing it” are also associated with identifying others of different theological standpoints. We might reasonably suppose that what we have here is a *post hoc* appreciation of theological difference rather than an adoption of or active engagement with the approach to preaching of another trainee preacher. This would benefit from further research.

### ***Role models***

Role models, as discussed theoretically in chapter 3, operate passively in the development of a preacher, for they are observed as good or bad examples for the student to imitate, adopt or avoid, sometimes in ways not appreciated by the student. Where role models are active in the training of the preacher, they are considered later in this chapter as mentor or instructor or teacher. While these educative functions may in practice cohere in one individual, I shall in theory treat them separately, and attempt to portray how the subjects viewed these different functions in their learning development.

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<sup>36</sup> FS3 Interview 10.

<sup>37</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>38</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

In fact interviewees spoke more extensively about the existence and effect of role models than about any other factor or influence, taking up fully one-fifth of the transcribed interviews. The discourse and the perceived influence was spread fairly equally among the subjects, with only two being markedly reticent about models, their responses on the subject accounting for less than 5% of their respective interviews.

Role models were perceived to have had more of an effect upon the practice of the subjects during the times when they were initially learning to preach, as might be expected, for they were listening to these role models with a view to learning about preaching. So G\_\_, referring to a ‘missions conference’ to which he was invited to accompany Dr Wilkinson:

In that kind of context I was more aware of thinking, “why is this effective?” More a case of thinking, “what is it about this preaching that connects with people and sort of what can I learn about this for my own preaching?” When you’re in a context where you are in a sense there to learn, as well as learning from the content, learning from the style of delivery and how people communicated, I was probably more consciously aware of analysing the way people were preaching in a context like that than back in a church.<sup>39</sup>

The student was focussing on several aspects of the preaching through this experience of modelling, particularly in the area of rhetoric. In common with many of the interviewees, the effect of role models was mentioned far more frequently than specific instruction with respect to training institutions.

Another subject who identified himself as coming from an evangelical background spoke of the formative influence of preachers he heard in terms of “helping to grow.” In the context this may be read as a reference to growing in leadership ability, as well as wisdom, ability to handle biblical text, and in authority as a teacher or preacher. All of these are assumed by the speaker as fundamental to preaching:

*Interviewer: You mentioned S\_\_ and a number of others in the CU at school. Do you think they helped you to grow as a Christian as much as or more than they impressed upon you a shape of preaching or gave you models of preaching?*

*Interviewee: They did preach to me as a Christian but they also helped me to grow by giving opportunities for me to lead within the CU setting, so we often had to lead Bible studies or take a*

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<sup>39</sup> FS3 Interview 01.

mid-week service. I suppose that would be modelled on the sort of manner of something they pretty much did themselves.<sup>40</sup>

In his reflection on preachers who had shaped his spirituality he is admitting that their ways of working had also impressed themselves upon him.

K\_\_\_, a female then in her twenties, speaks with a high degree of self-reflection on the influence of models. Noting the unusually large number of very proficient Local Preachers based at EHD, she considered carefully and said that some were models to imitate and others were not:

And I think some of them perhaps I... [slight pause and uncertainty here] ...emulated unconsciously. I probably thought if I model myself on them, without making a deliberate decision to do that... Others perhaps I didn't model myself on in quite the same way.<sup>41</sup>

Her analysis of the imitative mechanisms brought up the importance to her of having similarities of personality with the model. She continued:

And that may have been because they were quite personally different to me in terms of personality, would preach in a way that I knew that I wasn't being called to preach, in the sense that we in the sense all have to follow that call within our own personality, that we all have to be ourselves rather than somebody else (*slight embarrassed laugh here*) and while I might have respected what they did, I knew that wasn't what I was called to do.<sup>42</sup>

A high level of self-knowledge is revealed here. The speaker realises that her emulation of the role models was selective, and that she was filtering, even if somewhat unconsciously, what was presented to her at the time. Her justification is couched in terms that come from the discourse of vocation as well as a discourse of personal development, revealed in the statement that "we all have to be ourselves rather than somebody else."

I note as well in this comment the opportunity afforded to the student by a larger number than usual of preachers to whom a student might turn for advice as well as modelling influence. Others referred to the specific role modelling effects of David Wilkinson, as this speaker does:

I think we were seeing very good models of preaching from other people. I think particularly David and A\_\_\_ were modelling a

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<sup>40</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>41</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>42</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

style of preaching that was particularly powerful and was having an impact on people and certainly I think a lot of my early preaching and even preaching now was based on styles and things and ways of doing things that I saw David and A\_\_\_ doing... I think there was quite a lot of teaching in the way that they preached, and think that's been quite an influence on me. When I preach I try and have an element of teaching in my preaching.

The speaker has learned from the preachers cited not only theologically, but homiletically, not only what to believe and how to be a Christian, but what should make up a sermon. This admission of the influence points up the features of the preaching that he admired, that it was “powerful” and “had an impact on people.” Of course no honest preacher would imply a direct cause-and-effect link between the “styles and ... ways of doing things” that they employ and the “impact,” without denying the agency of God and the freedom of the listener’s response. Nevertheless students will often as in this case attempt to shape and hone their preaching to resemble that of their admired models, for they would not deny the preacher’s responsibility in the act of communication.

Other ideals for preaching as drawn from models are stated by P\_\_\_, a male in his thirties during his time at EHD:

I guess in terms of a pattern of preaching I’ve had two experiences of ministry under two very different people that were very formative for me, and gave me a ground that I hope I’ve always continued: Alec Motyer and David Wilkinson. I think in their own different ways, having such a gift in their own particular way of bringing the Bible to life, and making it relevant to everyday life, and drawing on illustrations, contemporary illustrations – all the kind of things that you would hope for in preaching – that’s kind of given me something that I’ve always aspired to...<sup>43</sup>

The elements of preaching that this speaker has tried to emulate are enumerated quite clearly, and derive from a specific situation of serving as an assistant minister “under two very different people.” This afforded him the opportunity to be mentored, and to be in an apprentice-like situation, and this was deeply valued by him. Another interviewee recognised this powerful potential influence but in this exchange sought to separate the homiletical approaches from the theological content, being prepared (at the time of the interview, at any rate) to put some clear water, theologically speaking, between her and this early role model:

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<sup>43</sup> FS3 Interview 08.

I maintain that David's one of the best preachers that I know, but I wouldn't say that I try to model myself on David's preaching because I am me, and my theology is very different to David's, really, but in terms of his ability to communicate big ideas in a very simple way, that's what I aspire to, and that's something I really, really value about his communication skills.<sup>44</sup>

The speaker also spoke of the importance of another role model from her theological college:

... later on ...I really enjoyed listening to F\_, partly because of the academic rigour tempered by humanity that she brought to her preaching... I take different bits from different preachers, I take them as gifts offered, really.<sup>45</sup>

A very good self-reflective quality probably contributed to an ability to benefit from a wide range of role models. An open or flexible attitude to others would also seem to be beneficial to the learning of this preacher.

Finally I want to take note of the subject who, despite efforts at self-reflection, was not able to identify specific influences:

I have to say that this whole question of trying to work out what has influenced me I do find incredibly difficult to answer. I've given it a lot of thought since you actually wrote and said what it was going to be about. It's just an intriguing one to think about. I can't say that there's anyone I would really say I've modelled myself on.<sup>46</sup>

However, even she was constrained by her understanding of learning and specifically how preaching is learned to admit that

It must have been caught from people I've seen, and it must have inspired me, even though I can't actually identify people.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the large amount of reflection about role models gained from the interviewees, this speaker's hesitation does point up the limitation of the phenomenological method used to explore this area. More explicit and conscious reflections are available from the interviewees on the style and effects of mentors, for this is a far stronger intentional relationship.

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<sup>44</sup> FS3 Interview 02.

<sup>45</sup> FS3 Interview 02.

<sup>46</sup> FS3 Interview 05.

<sup>47</sup> FS3 Interview 05.

## ***Mentoring***

For the participants in this field study, mentoring was also experienced outside of the relationship with the Methodist Local Preachers' Tutor, and it is important to emphasise that the study therefore is of the student's experience of different kinds of mentoring rather than any kind of evaluation of the formal Methodist provision of a Mentor. It should also be noted Wilkinson only acted as a Local Preachers' Tutor to one of the subjects interviewed, although I will maintain that his influence on some went beyond modelling preaching and leadership – particularly where there was a working or collaborative relationship – to what may in fact be characterised as good mentoring practice.

Looking at the volume of the discourse on different subjects, the most significant features of mentoring that the subjects discussed in the interviews were coaching (attention to practice through feedback and guided reflection), teaching (imparting knowledge, advice, wisdom, etc) and encouragement (personal support and guidance with the result of strengthening resolve and dedication to the task of learning preaching.)

Mentioned less often and discussed less extensively, but still apparently significant for student development were: learning through observation of the mentor, being given responsibility and feeling free to experiment, and being encouraged to find one's own voice, to depart from the model or models offered by the mentor.

Although not all experiences of mentors were positive, there were only two who made no comment about any significant mentoring experience or who had had no contact with a Tutor.

The effect of the mentor that was mentioned most often by the interviewees was the attention to practice, engaging in reviewing the student's work or giving valuable feedback. This extended in one case to devising and implementing a peer review / relationship structure that was highly valued. This is of course not direct mentoring, but it did seem to derive from Wilkinson's wider approach to encouraging and developing the ministries of others.

Along with the importance of feedback was teaching: Seven out of the twelve referred to significantly effective didactic input from mentors (who were not always the Local Preachers' Tutor). Aligned with this in the minds of three interviewees was what could be learned through what one termed 'osmosis' and which occurred as practice and theory were discussed in the context of active collaborative ministry by



the student and the mentor, quite often in the company of others. Thus L\_\_, a female then in her twenties:

I remember leading a service where I was leading and David was preaching, and so within that meeting beforehand when you kind of meet to plan the worship, there's a kind of interaction and discussion about what worship's about and what do you hope will happen, and I think that was really important in learning, not just planning, but stuff that I guess probably most people assume that you learn by osmosis or something.<sup>48</sup>

Here is an example of situated learning that seems to have encompassed learning by doing, married theory with practice, and incorporated reflection on practice, but within an informal mentoring rather than formal institutional structure. Implicit in this description is also an interaction with peers, supporting the significance of peers to the learning, as discussed earlier.

Two of the contributors, slightly older, were employed by the church and so worked with and under Wilkinson. They also spoke of the impact of peer relationships on their development. P\_\_, a male in his thirties at the time, emphasised the encouragement that he was given as much by the way of working as by what may have been said:

from day one it was clear to me that he [Wilkinson] valued my ministry, what I could contribute, and he wasn't simply going to say, "right, here's your task, go and do it," (but) "we're going to sit down and we're going to pray together, we're going to work together, we're going to envision together about the church and about the Chaplaincy." ... That was a very important foundation because it gave me a security really...<sup>49</sup>

Here the speaker values the collaboration, but particularly the respect he felt given to him by Wilkinson. That acknowledgement and acceptance is another example of legitimisation accorded to the student or trainee, and its value was seen by this interviewee in terms of a relationship of friendship.

Mentors were seen as responsible for a great deal of personal encouragement to the subjects. This was not always within the formal system. Referring to the large number of experienced preachers who effectively made up a community of practice, one female described the situation:

...there were, as I said before, within this community lots of people around who would offer advice and encouragement, and

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<sup>48</sup> FS3 Interview 04.

<sup>49</sup> FS3 Interview 08.

whom you knew you could go to if you were struggling with a particular issue... ...because of this large contingent of preachers, preachers that were either younger preachers, or older preachers who were very interested in the younger preachers and wanting to encourage them.<sup>50</sup>

Another one pointed up the effect on her of those who were available for advice and counsel:

I think I had conversations with people when it felt kind of hard going and I thought, I felt like giving up on a couple of occasions, but there were people who came alongside...<sup>51</sup>

Such encouragement encompassed one important area which argues against a view of mentoring as simply or primarily serving to induct the individual into the ways and mores of the community of practice. In several cases a rather anti-institutional effect is promoted when individuals are able to maintain considerable independence of thought and practice. T\_\_ observed:

I had been very struck as a very young evangelical by the challenge of having people whose theology I didn't respect terrifically from the Circuit listen to my sermons and give me feedback and the challenge that comes with that when you are in the Circuit situation and know that some people are, as I would have thought then, off the map in terms of theology [laughter] and recognising that God works through all of these different means.<sup>52</sup>

Mentoring and the provision in the system of a formal mentor was not always a positive experience. One female, then in her thirties commented:

...he wasn't interested in developing me, he was interested in correcting me and what he saw was wrong with me.<sup>53</sup>

This is another example of difference between mentor and student being allowed, and probably often encouraged, within the institutional structures. The interviewees seemed in general willing to turn theological differences to their educational advantage, and as noted in the first field study in chapter 6, this occurred slightly more often in the testimony of female respondents. In fact recognition of difference at some level is crucial for some, if it is done in an affirming, encouraging way. This may be seen in A\_\_'s affirmation of the mentoring received from her other Tutor:

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<sup>50</sup> FS3 Interview 03.

<sup>51</sup> FS3 Interview 04.

<sup>52</sup> FS3 Interview 09.

<sup>53</sup> FS3 Interview 12.

M\_\_\_, who was the person I was on note with and mentored me in that sense, she never did that. [i.e. correcting] She always valued who I was as an individual, she never wanted me to preach like her, she never wanted me to do it in her way, she let me be myself and pushed me to be myself.<sup>54</sup>

This encouragement to ‘be myself’ was mentioned by three of the subjects, and in such affirming ways, that it may be pointed out as feature of mentoring that contributes to important educational goals from the perspective of this particular institution’s aims in training and developing its preachers. Thus K\_\_\_ said:

...while they were encouraging me to think about the things I needed to think about, they weren’t trying to make me into clones of themselves, if you see what I mean. They kind of respected the differences too, and encouraged me to be myself, which I think is important.<sup>55</sup>

Forms of mentoring, then, have been valued by many of the interviewees, for sound instruction, feedback on practice, and most particularly when accompanied by encouragement that affirms their emerging sense of who they are as preachers.

## **Conclusion**

The preachers interviewed in this study exhibited a high degree of self-awareness and an ability to reflect on their development as preachers and the formative influences in this process. Senior role models contributed to their vocations, but not as much for this group as the permission given by the closely observed presence of peer role models. We see that with respect to a preacher’s later development, senior role models (both those present in childhood or early faith development as well as those present when learning to preach) do have a significant part to play in contributing to the preacher’s understanding of the task. A very important early stage of learning to preach would consist of identifying the models and their influence. In addition, the ‘hothouse’ culture of Elm Hall Drive Methodist church from 1990-1995 gave rise to significant and easily discernible learning influences. These were chiefly in the positive role models available, encouragement to test a call to preach, and the spread of a mentoring effect that went beyond the occasionally inoperative system of having a mentor or supervisor assigned to the student who is On Note or On Trial. When older or more experienced preachers were able to come into contact with student preachers, there were clear benefits to the younger through feedback and encouragement. Collaborative working, through formal team ministry or informal

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<sup>54</sup> FS3 Interview 12.

<sup>55</sup> FS3 Interview 3.

groupings coming together to plan experimental services, was significant for several of the subjects, and points again to the value of learning on the job in the company of more experienced practitioners.

In the interviews conducted for this field study, the preachers have revealed that they had significant influences from precisely the kinds of social learning that I have been considering as part of being in intentional communities of preaching practice. In my final chapter I will draw together these strands and progress towards a set of recommendations and principles for best educative and learning practice.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Revising and exploring the community of practice**

In this chapter I summarise my research findings on formative influences on preachers. I consider limitations in the argument and areas requiring further research, and I propose a version of Lave and Wenger's concept of community of practice that can fruitfully apply to the developmental trajectories of Christian preachers.

#### ***Theoretical overview***

In my Introduction I argued that learning to preach goes far beyond learning what to preach. Being orthodox does not guarantee being hermeneutically wise, homiletically capable, nor rhetorically effective. The meaning of the preaching event is not solely to be found in the theological content of the sermon, but must include the meaning-making process in the interaction between God, the text, the preacher and the listeners. On this basis I have undertaken to examine the development of the preacher from a social perspective. This allows consideration of forms of learning that are mediated in the social and cultural environment of the preacher and that are, I am proposing, neglected or poorly understood in our time. Seeing the preacher as some kind of 'divinely called auto-didact' can miss important elements vital for a thick description of the process of learning preaching.

At the beginning of my research I asked a number of questions. Can learning and thinking styles and other cognitivist theories of learning be used to critique existing educational strategies for teaching preaching? How far can theories of social learning, including situated learning and the concept of the community of practice provide better models for improving the development of preachers? How extensive is imitation and modelling in the development of preachers, and to what extent can positive outcomes be encouraged? Is there an argument for a more substantive role for the supervisor / mentor / coach? How can peers and colleagues assist the growth of the learning preacher? To answer these questions I undertook research that was both theoretical and empirical.

#### **Adult learning, cognitive theories and learning styles**

In chapter 2 I considered varieties of cognitive learning theory from the individual perspective as they apply to the situation of adult learners. I drew an important distinction between adult education and adult learning, suggesting that the 'turn to the learner' marked by concepts such as Malcolm Knowles' *andragogy* represented a

shift in understanding that was essentially empowering to the learner since it recognised many of the realities of how adult learners learn. A corollary is that students of preaching are in important respects in charge of their own learning. Institutions must be careful not to encroach upon that sovereignty with a one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum planning. At the same time, and requiring what can seem at times like an unwise degree of trust in institutional structures, ministers in the process of Christian formation require a child-like submission to God and an open-ness to learning from God. In essence, preachers in training should be treated like adults by the institutions, but should themselves have a child-like aspect to their learning. This means being 'teachable' and having an open attitude towards learning, and a generous response to those supervising their learning. It could mean as well embracing instructional correction as from God. This sounds an idealistic prescription, but one that derives from wisdom both natural and biblical.

Dismissing a strictly behavioural analysis of the preacher's development, I considered learning in terms of cognitive process and thinking styles and asked whether Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, constructivist learning theories and the idea of conceptions of learning can contribute to our understanding of the task of learning to preach. These theories do show points of connection, but the concept of learning styles was seen to lack theoretical coherence and empirical verification, as well as having methodological limitations in the practical world of classroom instruction. The concept is not without merit, however, when students are invited to engage with it, and helped to reflect and gain insight into their own preferred mode of learning. This can in turn give them opportunities to control their own learning and to become more effective and sympathetic teachers themselves.

In summary, the concept of learning styles is less useful for changing methods of teaching, but very useful if it feeds into the action-reflection cycle of learning, and builds on the self-regulation of adult learners. This draws most importantly on the learning cycle as described by Honey and Mumford and based on the work of D.A. Kolb as cited in chapter 2. The dissenting voice of Phil Race usefully reminds the pedagogue that learning schemata are not to be imposed on adult learners. Instead a richly described model of what happens naturally (or at least what can happen optimally) can make teachers aware of the respect and accommodation to differences that should be accorded adult learners. The persistence of traditional attitudes and practices, and a chronic limitation on resources may ultimately give the lie to protestations of 'student-centred learning.' But as educators in their own preaching

ministry, ministers will also benefit from recognising the varieties of learning styles in congregations they face, and should take steps to ensure that their preaching is richly formulated to serve these differences.

## Imitation and role models

In chapter 3 I began a transition to socially-oriented theories of learning by examining the concept of imitation. Imitation, or *mimesis*, is seen by some to run through human endeavour, psychology and culture in fundamental ways. It may be pictured as a driving force, a fuel or chemical reaction that keeps the social engine running. To explore it fully theologically and with respect to preaching has been notably done in a recently completed doctoral dissertation by Allan G. Demond.<sup>1</sup> I limit myself to the observation that *mimesis* can also be seen to have been provided by God for the generation of much that is positive and redeemable about human existence. It is present in all forms of learning for the sake of the greater good, and particularly as the believer seeks to be more like Christ.

I noted that teachers of preaching from Augustine to the present have recognised and recommended imitation as of *prima facie* value to the preacher who desires to learn from others. But copying and mere behavioural imitation are discouraged, lest in Fred Craddock's words it produce "caricatures in the pulpit."<sup>2</sup> Instead writers speak of paying attention in order to "catch the spirit" of great preachers<sup>3</sup> or of having their "attitudes, philosophy, and style of preaching"<sup>4</sup> formed by modelling themselves on preachers heard in younger years. By way of examples I briefly considered African-American traditions of learning preaching, and examined the influence of possible role models for the great Welsh preacher Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, himself a frequently acknowledged model for many evangelical and non-conformist preachers today. I further argued that learning preaching by imitation may be seen in three areas that contribute to the identity and functioning of the preacher: skills development, character formation, and theological standpoint.

I suggested that, from Paul's urging in Philippians 2:5, for example, imitation is, as it were woven into the fabric of discipleship, and that the development of the preacher's character is bound to be a matter of striving to be more like those close role models who themselves are evidently and earnestly engaged in *imitatio Christi*.

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<sup>1</sup> Demond, "Teaching Preaching.

<sup>2</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Hale, 'Recent Books on Preaching and Preachers', p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> David J. Shea, 'Self-Understanding in Catholic Preaching', pp. 62-63.

But is this supported by the experiences and testimonies of preachers today? The modelling dynamic may well be operating at a level beneath articulation or conscious reflection, but at the level of phenomenological investigation allowed by my research methods, there is not a strong stream of evidence, as we saw and upon which I will shortly comment.

## **Situated learning and mentoring**

Having noted something of the cultural, anthropological and theological significance of imitation, it then became possible to consider some more overt and outward patterns and activities in the social development of the preacher. Thus in chapter 4 I examined theories of situated learning and mentoring. Situated learning encompasses ‘learning through doing,’ which is fundamental to developing as a preacher, but goes far beyond it, to encompass the relationships with peers, role models, mentors, assessors, and congregations that both feed into practical competence and are part of the community agreement or status bestowed on the learner that he or she has become competent. I located this analysis within ‘communities of practice’ that enable ‘legitimate peripheral participation,’ as defined and explored by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. The concepts were proposed firstly in a study of five widely varying learning situations,<sup>5</sup> and developed by Wenger in later works.<sup>6</sup> Were there, I asked at the beginning of my research, any such learning situations for preachers that resembled these and could be called a community of practice?

In the second part of chapter 4 I discussed mentoring and peer learning as particularly grounded aspects of situated learning, and I examined the concepts for potential application to the learning of preaching. Mentoring and forms of coaching are in some senses structurally established in denominational training schemes such as those provided by the Methodist Church in the UK and the Church of England. I observed that a primary weakness or point of compromise can occur when the mentor is expected also to evaluate and provide reports which materially affect the student’s career progress. To this it might be objected that, as in the traditional communities of practice as first examined by Lave and Wenger, those individuals providing help and guidance are in practice the same ones charged with delivering evaluative assessment.

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<sup>5</sup> Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*.

<sup>6</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, Wenger and McDermott, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*.



## Peer learning

The only set of relationships that seems free of the gate-keeper's oversight is the peer group, where one implicit condition of the trust peers put in one another is that they do not have the institutional assessor's power over one another. As noted above, the potential of learning from and through peer groups and that of peer-assisted learning is supported by a body of educational literature, although the particularities of Christian ministers learning to preach together are only just beginning to be addressed.<sup>7</sup> When the developmental practice of preaching is conducted in the context of a peer group, it finds favour with students and teachers. The fact remains that it is much rarer to find this kind of educational practice in homiletics in UK than in US seminaries.

A particular kind of community of preaching practice that I had wanted to investigate is the interaction of peers in assisting each other as members of a community in their development as preachers. In theory, this had the strength of involving practitioners who have roughly equal status and who are engaged in the same or similar practices, such as preparing and delivering sermons, and would fit with the first dimension of a community of practice as Wenger defined it, that it was "a community of mutual engagement." Yet so infrequently in the first two field studies did I find coherent mention of or extended reflection on peer-assisted learning that I had to reconsider this. In the data generated by the preachers studied for this research, there was hardly ever mentioned a particular network or group of preachers to whom on a day-to-day, or even month-by-month basis a preaching minister could refer for advice or comfort. There was seldom meaningful contact or any sense of relationship with other preachers (qua preachers) which would allow them to benefit from the experience of seniors, to pass on their experience, or to be a positive role model for those who were less experienced or advanced in the work. If pastors' fellowships, ministers' presbyteries, or deanery meetings ever function in these ways, it was not mentioned by the participants in my research.

I noted in chapter 8 that there was a small seam to be mined in the third field study where the young Methodist preachers spoke about the influence of peers during the period when they were receiving their call to preach, and one instance of a continuing support network. These instances do not, as I will discuss shortly, 'make the grade' for a demonstration of a community of practice as such, nor does what happened in this respect resemble very much the practice of peer-assisted learning as

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<sup>7</sup> I have already cited several contributors to Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching*.

often advocated by educational theorists for the learning of children. Nevertheless, from its apparent significance for some of these ministers, I do believe I am able to make recommendations for the establishment of learning structures for preaching that are peer-oriented and that owe much to the ideas of community of practice.<sup>8</sup>

## Learning with the congregation

But was there another understanding of community of practice that would illuminate the learning trajectory of the preacher by making reference to the social location(s), or *habitus* of that practice? The dimension of ‘mutual engagement’ that marks a community of practice is in fact powerfully present in the sermon event, in which the preacher may be the active mouthpiece and the congregation silent participants, but which is also marked by powerful if hidden negotiations over the social meaning, as well as the meaning(s) in the thematic sense, of the sermon. This brings in a second dimension of a community of practice, that members are engaged in a ‘negotiated enterprise.’ For example, there is usually a subtle communal negotiation over the language that may be used in a sermon, the issues that may be addressed by a sermon, and the responses that may be made to a sermon.

The third dimension according to Wenger recognises that the community of practice draws on a ‘shared repertoire’ composed of “resources for negotiating meaning.” Again, this requires a degree of generous interpretation to be applicable to the relationship of preacher and congregation, but important correspondences were identified. The preacher and any congregation faced with a new (to them) preacher are both in important ways learning to preach as the preaching resources are identified, negotiated and utilised for the preaching event. An important implication is that preachers entering parish or Circuit ministry with regular preaching commitments can be much more aware of the process by which they and their congregations will *together* learn to preach the sermons that God has for that church at that time.

## Community of practice indicators

Wenger went on to note fourteen **indicators** that a community of practice has formed.<sup>9</sup> These were: sustained mutual relationships, substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs, mutually defining identities, and certain

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<sup>8</sup> Extensive practical implications arising from ideas of teaching preaching within communities of practice are also developed by the Catholic homiletician Gregory Heille, “Finding Support from School, Denomination and Academy” in *ibid.*, pp. 223-238.

<sup>9</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, pp. 125-126.

styles recognised as displaying membership. In the area of task-oriented indicators, he lists knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise, along with shared ways of engaging in doing things together, rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation, absence of introductory preambles, very quick setup of a problem to be discussed, and the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products. He also includes specific tools, representations and other artifacts, local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter, jargon and shortcuts to communication, and finally a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.

One of the paradigmatic groups he studied were service engineers for office photocopiers. In fact, it is not difficult to see a version of virtually all of these indicators in most groups of preachers when considered as practitioners together with peers and with their accustomed hearers. Exceptions would probably be ‘rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation,’ and ‘very quick set-up of a problem to be discussed’ and ‘knowing what others know’ – signs that preaching is practiced in far more creative and individual ways than photocopier repairs. Thank goodness.

I have however resisted the attempt to map these factors directly onto the empirical data. This is principally because of the range and depth of the sociological study that would be required to do so. Secondly, such an effort would probably not be repaid when the best outcome for a study like this is enlightenment about existing practice and the improvement of future practice, rather than a quasi-scientific proof of precise correlations. Instead I have asked whether a version of the concept oriented towards practical theology might be useful. What might this look like?

## **Revising the concept**

The concept of community of practice as advanced and developed by Lave and Wenger has specific aspects and implications and, as I discussed in chapter 4, it is important to respect these parameters lest unwarranted conclusions be advanced concerning forms of social learning and types of community neither considered by their research nor envisaged in their conclusions. This means being specific about the ways in which preachers may or may not belong to communities of practice with respect to their learning and personal development as preachers. On the basis of my empirical research, there does not appear to exist in the field among preachers and those learning to preach sufficiently exact correspondence with the kinds of social learning that they (Lave and Wenger) elucidate that can justify transferring in

wholesale fashion the full breadth of their conclusions and recommendations. As Wenger notes, “Calling every imaginable social configuration a community of practice would render the concept meaningless.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than abandon Lave and Wenger’s concept, I will propose a variant of it to help us to evaluate existing practice and to envisage and imagine improvements in the learning experiences of those called to preach.

The (mostly) reformed, Protestant preachers that I have studied are, I have argued, involved in and are dependent on socially mediated learning experiences. Community is the locus for their practice (for no-one preaches to an empty room). Other preachers feature more or less strongly in their formative processes, and they are dependent on traditions of preaching that are made present to them in early and later stages of their careers. As a modification of Lave and Wenger’s “community of practice” I am proposing that highly significant aspects of the learning trajectories of preachers take place in what I will term “communities of agreed sermonic enterprise.”

I am using the term enterprise instead of practice for it brings with it teleological and purposive connotations of words such as ‘venture’ and ‘project’, of endeavours with quite definite and identifiable aims in view. Naturally the enterprise is sermonic, that is to say, it is to do with the sermon as a “naming and narrating” event.<sup>11</sup> But the preparation leading to that event and the follow-on from that event also deserve to be considered as part of the enterprise, shaping that event-in-time along with subsequent sermon events involving the same participants. Finally, it is an agreed enterprise. There exists a shared understanding of the value, of the purpose, and of at least some of the means to achieve that purpose. This small term betrays perhaps a serious stumbling block, for preachers are by no means all agreed on the nature of what they are doing. The expectations of listeners, instruction of mentors, and examples of immensely diverse practices may together make even a lowest common denominator impossible to find for the preacher caught in the cross-fire, as it were. We cannot always take for granted a high level of agreement in the sermonic enterprise, but it is reasonable to trust that the enterprise will include a joint pursuit of truth and understanding of what is a sermon, what it is for, and what it sounds and feels like.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 122. Although as discussed in chapter 4, their description of what constitutes a community opened up their definition to just that criticism.

<sup>11</sup> As discussed in ch. 1, p. 20 in which I describe the sermon, after Buttrick, as: “a negotiated event that takes place within a community and which has explanatory power to constitute the community.”

## ***Six frames of the CASE concept***

To aid this pursuit I am proposing six frames through which a community of agreed sermonic enterprise (CASE) may be viewed. The first frame is the homiletical teaching and the accumulated, expressed wisdom about preaching that the novice preacher can receive didactically in various ways and settings from the Christian community of which she or he is a part. To be sure, books and treatises on preaching, lectures and other forms of verbal instruction are primarily an aspect of cognitive forms of learning, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. They may be received in quite individualistic, not social ways. But it is important to recognise that, in the ‘thick’ description of social learning that I have attempted, such forms of instruction are also properly speaking one way in which the communities of Christian preachers extend and replicate themselves over time. In my empirical studies, however, there was a general lack of testimony to the effectiveness of, and lack of appreciation of such forms of didactic instruction. The explication of concepts is but one aspect of the community of agreed sermonic enterprises; there are other frames by which we must view what is happening when a preacher learns to preach.

A second frame is the andragogical, or adult learning counterpart to the first frame. It outlines and describes the learning dynamic of the community. Of course this will draw on the traditions and understandings of Christian education, and will recognise that preaching has dual status in this respect: preaching as practice is on the one hand a small part of the many Christian practices that are continually being learned by the gathered church community. On the other hand preaching is a significant means for some of that learning to take place. It is necessary to avoid confusing these.

Malcolm Knowles’s six key principles of adult learning<sup>12</sup> are important to observe in the relationships between all the agents in the CASE: the learner preacher, the mentor, the role model, the peer practitioner, and the congregation.

The third frame is the ‘cloud of witnesses,’ or in other words the traditional examples of preaching and Christian witness and exemplars from the past. As experienced by a developing preacher, the cloud of witnesses also includes role models, and what David Schlafer termed the ‘ghosts and graces’ of one’s ‘preaching parents.’<sup>13</sup> Preachers heard and / or seen in action, live or on video, sermons read or listened to through audio recordings will have an impact, often through the imitative mechanisms identified in chapter 4. As I noted in my comments on the formation of

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<sup>12</sup> According to Malcolm Knowles as discussed in ch. 2, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word*, p. 33.

the preacher in chapter 1, the student preacher is also subject to the dynamic of character formation and transformation during and following these encounters, as the meaning of the sermons become the means of God's graceful work on the listening preacher-to-be. The social aspect of this formational dynamic is noted by James Nieman as "the way social character formation occurs among those who engage a particular practice within its governing domain."<sup>14</sup> The third frame is thus concerned with both role models and their effect on the learner preacher.

A fourth frame allows us to consider the relationships between preachers and their mentors, and the kind of positive and negative effects, affirming as well as discouraging, that a mentor can have on a preacher. Do schemes for mentoring fall far short of the beneficial effects of a mentor freely chosen by the preacher and coming at a time that the student preacher chooses? Again, the matter of character formation, of being moulded by the attention and influence of another, is implicit in this frame.

Fifthly, these communities may be framed by considering the peer practitioners, and relationships with those whose self-identity involves a sense of equality of experience and expertise. Such relationships provide a companionship that can work in affective ways to support and encourage. They can also provide resources to assist in achieving preaching tasks as well as providing stimuli to creativity and innovation that are part of significant developmental movements in the project of learning to preach. The enthusiasm expressed for ad hoc versions of peer assisted learning, though infrequent in the empirical studies, align with theoretical underpinnings to support my argument that it could and should be developed as part of a learning community.

Finally my proposed concept of a community of agreed sermonic enterprise may be framed by viewing the congregation as listener, as teacher and as learner. A minister or priest arriving in a church or parish will encounter a set of expectations about the sermons preached as part of worship. There will be more or less precisely expressed customs regarding a sermon's length and its place in the service, the position of delivery, and the homiletical nature of the sermon: is it teaching on Christian living and discipleship, exposition of scripture, topical, sacramental, etc. Less explicit but still discernable is the thematic relationship of the sermon to scripture, to Christian tradition and doctrine, and to the rest of the service or liturgy. There will also be

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<sup>14</sup> James Nieman, 'Why the Idea of Practice Matters', in Long and Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching*.

congregational expectations and understandings for the minister to discover about the rhetoric of the sermon, its intellectual level, the style of public speaking, and the degree of self-revelation allowed, and of course this is a two-way process: the congregation has things to learn from most preachers about listening to sermons and hearing the word of God. All of these are part of the negotiation that takes place as a preacher and a congregation learn to create together that sermon event.

This is not new – in their 1989 book on learning preaching cited earlier, Wardlaw et al. note:

We purposely involve the students in teaching methods that model a congregation's participation in the sermon formation process.<sup>15</sup>

Here the institutional setting being referred to consciously and strategically looks forward to the future setting of learning preaching that happens (most often) after training. Feedback and reflection on practice facilitated and provided by select congregational members, allows the preacher to learn and to develop sermons that are not only better sermons, but better for the community. Such a feedback context can be as intimate as one or two trusted church members providing criticism and assessment, or as broad as a web-based 'blog' where reactions to and discussions of a sermon can give the preacher considerable guidance on the effectiveness of his or her communication strategy.<sup>16</sup>

Less widely used, but not without strong advocates in the field of homiletics is the creation of sermon planning groups to facilitate the creation of sermons that reflect more accurately the concerns and issues facing the intended listeners. This can take a variety of forms, and no doubt internet-based communication can extend the possibilities here as well.

These six frames enable us to evaluate training schemes and the contexts in which future preachers must learn. They will be used to assist in analysing the empirical studies and in the last chapter to develop both theological reflection and practical recommendation.

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<sup>15</sup> Wardlaw and Baumer, *Learning Preaching*, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Such on line reactions to sermons, as well as the recycling of sermons, in both text and video form (e.g. YouTube™) considerable extend the 'biography' of sermons. This is a phenomenon too new to be treated in this study, but I would suggest that learning to preach cultural 'texts' that can or may be recycled in these ways is a further challenge to the developing twenty-first century preacher.

## ***Empirical review***

After detailing the research methodologies in chapter 5, I analysed three field studies in the following three chapters. In these I attempted by means of a kind of empirical triangulation to locate the concepts phenomenologically in the experiences of a range of Protestant UK preachers. Here I review those findings and consider how they support the CASE concept.

### **Church of Scotland ministers**

The first field study was based on an electronic questionnaire completed by 180 Church of Scotland ministers. I decided to focus on those who had been preaching for fourteen years or less (50% of the sample) to enable a more consistent evaluation of current or recent training opportunities that such a cohort might have shared, as well as to limit the colourations and distortions of memory. I recognised that the demand characteristics of my survey meant that I was possibly working with a sample of ministers who were more committed to or interested in preaching than the population of Church of Scotland ministers as a whole. For this reason not too much should be inferred from the agreement by 89% of the sample with the statement that “preaching has always formed a significant part of my vocation,” however encouraging that might sound to denominational boards and councils. Instead I thought it important to look for background variations in attitudes to learning within the sample. I began with an attempt to identify motivations to learn in terms of vocation, current practice of preaching, and admiration of role models. The PPA (what I termed a Positive Preaching Attitude) was a factor that I identified statistically from the answers to a range of variables. These variables correlated strongly enough with each other to enable me to speak of each respondent’s attitude to preaching within his or her ministry and with respect to learning approaches.

This PPA factor demonstrated an interesting distribution across the sample, in that female ministers showed a different pattern from that of the males. The males in the survey sample clustered towards the higher PPA factor values, while the females spread across the range of values for this factor more evenly.<sup>17</sup> Why are women from the same cohorts so much less interested in preaching than men? This certainly highlights a need for further research.

The PPA factor proved useful in locating expressed attitudes and outlooks within both theological frameworks of sermon understanding and educational frameworks

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<sup>17</sup> See graphs in ch. 6, p. 124.



of learning situations. Thus I sought to investigate a correlation between the PPA factor and any of the theological understandings of the preacher's role. The theological understanding of preaching that dominated in the sample as a whole viewed the preacher as Educator (expanded in the questionnaire as "Explaining and helping listeners to understand and apply Christian principles"). That this is the dominant view or understanding among the sample indicates a belief or understanding that Christian education should be offered to the congregation and presumably that it should make something of a difference to the lives they lead. There is a clear alignment with a major understanding of the form and purpose of preaching, as discussed in the Introduction.<sup>18</sup>

Looking more deeply, it emerged that Herald (of Good News), Guardian (of received truth in scripture and doctrine), Parent (pastoral nurturing and protecting), and Expositor (explaining and applying Scripture) clustered together. This is not to say that they were equally prevalent, but that there was a correlation of these views with each other among the respondents. I then found a striking (if not exactly surprising) correlation between a high PPA factor and the view of the preacher as Expositor. Combined with a strong and significant correlation of the PPA factor with understanding the preacher as Herald and as Guardian, the picture emerges of a commitment, held by those who value preaching most highly, to certain modes of preaching that are, as I put it, "oriented around scripture and orthodoxy and their application to the life of the believer."<sup>19</sup> In other words those who most value preaching believe that its principal functions in the church are to teach from Holy Scripture, to proclaim the Gospel, and to inculcate and preserve right belief in their listeners.

Thus far I had only demonstrated empirically what may be gleaned from common approaches to preaching held by Reformed teachers of preaching, but it is a result nonetheless that confirms a widespread acceptance of such approaches. What is of greater interest here is any correlation of a high PPA factor with homiletical subject

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<sup>18</sup> It is useful to note that there may be a reflection here too of the modes of training received and experienced by the ministers. Lecture-based teaching, in my experience of listening to ordinands and candidates for the ministry, can lead to or encourage a lecture style of preaching, where the emphasis is on transmission of knowledge rather than speech that aims to persuade and change. This was not investigated in this field study, but points to an important area for research, and which might be summarised by the question, how far are styles of teaching experienced in ministerial formation reflected in and determinant of subsequent views and practices in Christian ministry? Such research could also draw on the PhD research (unpublished) of P.A. Bence, 'An Analysis of the Effect of Contrasting Theologies of Preaching on the Teaching of Preaching in British Institutions of Higher Learning' (Dissertation, St Andrews, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Ch. 6, p. 128.

areas AND with learning teaching modes. I found a preference for conceptually-oriented processes of continuing their development as preachers. However, I was surprised to find no clear correlation between the PPA factor and preferred educational methods or modes of homiletics development during ordination training.

Noting that those with a high PPA factor appear to have no great difficulty learning to preach, perhaps our concern should be with those who have a *low* PPA factor, since all ministers have preaching duties, and will need to learn to do it to at least a basic level of competency. Can we uncover directions and advice for life-long learning, or guidance for institutions that will help?

Across the sample as a whole, the most appreciated methods in widespread use were giving a sermon in a placement church with feedback, and giving a sermon followed by tutor or mentor feedback. These were not as widely experienced as other methods, or as often as might be desirable, but where experienced, they tended to be strongly appreciated. There are two conclusions from this particular finding relevant to this research. The first is that it demonstrates a clear embodiment of several of the major principles of adult learning, such as the importance of learning taking place in response to an obvious need to learn, taking place in a real-life situation, and taking place where there are problems to be solved. We also see evidence here of the action-reflection cycle of learning that is so valuable to the 'reflective practitioner.' Both of these aspects of adult learning are highlighted by the learning frame of the CASE concept.

The second conclusion involves the aspects of situated learning reflected in these preferred learning modes. Here there is more evidence for a community of agreed sermonic enterprise, for in the feedback received from congregation and mentor, it would appear that the values and ideals of the community are reinforced, and the language of the preacher is shaped to conform to that of the community. The precise nature and effect of congregational feedback on a preacher are worthy of a small research study. Of course, the need to understand the congregation, informally or through structured surveys, is beginning to be appreciated. I have pointed this out in my recent handbook on preaching in which I wrote:

Mark Greene in *The Three-Eared Preacher* ... explores this concept in depth and the book contains sample surveys to be used. For congregations that may be resistant to questionnaires, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale develops alternative ways of 'exegeting the congregation' in her *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk*

*Art ... These are part of a growing literature on congregational studies that preachers should make part of their own study.*<sup>20</sup>

Turning to the specific reported influence of mentors and role models, I noted that for those who had experience of coaching and oversight of their preaching from mentors, this was thought to be a strongly positive experience, especially when this had been provided by someone who had also been a role model prior to the student's ordination or candidature for the ministry. It also emerged that those who had early role models who had also mentored them, tended to report an equally positive experience from having mentors when in training. This suggests that receptivity to mentoring is as important as the provision of high quality mentoring. From the theological educator's perspective, an important area for further research is the extent to which student orientation to learning from mentoring may be grown and enhanced, or whether it is more or less fixed in a student from an early age or according to their personality.

There was a gender difference here, as fewer male ministers spoke of having had mentors, and further investigation is warranted to determine, for instance, whether there are gender-related tendencies to benefit from mentoring in preaching, as has been seen in other educational contexts. For instance, in a recent article on women's leadership development, focussing on women seeking high level administrative leadership positions in faith-based liberal arts institutions, Lafreneier and Longman found that:

The shadowing/mentoring experience had the greatest influence on increasing the participants' confidence in themselves as academic leaders and changing their thinking about their own leadership potential.<sup>21</sup>

The professions examined here would seem to parallel both preaching and the church leadership roles often (but by no means inevitably) associated with preaching. This indicates a particularly important area for further research in gender studies.

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<sup>20</sup> Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching with Humanity*, p. 141. References cited here are Mark Greene, *The Three-Eared Preacher*, (London: LICC, 1996), Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997). See also John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) and Roger Van Harn, *Pew Rights: For People Who Listen to Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992). For an example of congregational studies see Matthew Guest, 'Friendship, Fellowship and Acceptance: The Public Discourse of a Thriving Evangelical Congregation', in *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Shawna L. Lafreniere and Karen A. Longman, 'Gendered Realities and Women's Leadership Development: Participant Voices from Faith-Based Higher Education', *Christian Higher Education*, 7 (2008).

I noted that the only two methods experienced by more than 75% of the respondents were feedback from preaching in a placement church and voice training. I also noted that voice training generated the greatest range of reactions, negative and positive, indicating that a problem exists in matching educational provision to student needs and expectations. That there were only two widely experienced learning methods for the sample studied would seem to indicate a degree of institutional ambivalence towards the practicalities of helping preachers learn. Recommendations at the end of this chapter are an attempt to address these shortcomings.

### **Preachers' autobiographical essays**

The second field study analysed in chapter 7 drew on fifteen autobiographical essays written for a book I edited in 2004 and in which a selection of established and experienced practitioners reflected on their development and individual journeys as preachers.<sup>22</sup> The writers nearly all testified to the reality and strength of their inner vocation or sense of calling. In this they were guided by the wording of the original invitation to contribute to the book, and many were writing in the discourse and understanding of ministry within their traditions. This could sometimes be seen as providing strong, affective, intrinsic motivation both to preach and to learn to preach, motivation that, as we have discussed, is contributory to psychological mechanisms enabling efficient and so-called 'deep' learning.<sup>23</sup> I noted that explicitly remembered encouragement and feedback did not feature significantly in the accounts, nor did formal instruction during ministerial training, nor anything that would be recognisable as peer group influence. The communities of agreed sermonic enterprise in which these preachers grew up as children and / or were incorporated as adults were marked much more significantly by role models and mentors. Such figures were frequently mentioned, nearly always with admiration as well as gratitude: this is not perhaps surprising in an essay written for publication. Several preachers noted and reflected upon the power of the church culture in which they grew up, their familial culture, and / or their societal culture to impart values, skills, problems to be solved and conceptual frameworks which became operative for their preaching activity then or in later life. The individual church congregation is seen by some to be highly important in teaching the minister how to preach. Of the six frames through which a CASE may be viewed, number 3 (the 'cloud of witnesses') number 4 (mentors) and number 6 (congregations) feature prominently in these testimonies and

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<sup>22</sup> Stevenson, ed., *Pulpit Journeys*.

<sup>23</sup> Intrinsic motivations and deep learning are discussed in ch. 2, p. 52, footnote 65.

thus contributes to my thesis that preaching is significantly learned within its social contexts. In common with findings from the first field study, peer assisted learning (the fifth frame) hardly features at all, indicating that such learning, while commendable, is not historically a part of very many preachers' training.

### **Liverpool Methodist preachers**

It was clear that for the twelve preachers interviewed here there were many different influences and different kinds of influence. In keeping with the Methodist discourse of vocation, candidates spoke at length of their "call to preach" and related that sense of vocation to their learning opportunities and challenges. The level of self-reflection on learning related to early development was generally high, and seems to be related to the emphasis on understanding and weighing the call to preach. Teaching within a classroom environment or through written material appeared less valued than receiving appropriate and constructive feedback on practice, seeing role models (both older and of the same age), and having mentors who provide a balance of encouragement, teaching, advice and good example. All of these are in theory built into the structures of Methodist training of Local Preachers. This field study indicates that their delivery is qualitatively less consistent than students of preaching would like or could benefit from. However the examination of an exceptional community of agreed sermonic enterprise, marked by an unusual number of preaching vocations, reveals factors in learning preaching that may usefully be sought outside such environments as this community.

This community owed a great deal of its nurturing function to the minister of the church attended in the early 1990's by all of the preachers interviewed for this study: Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church and the associated Methodist Chaplaincy at Liverpool University. David Wilkinson spoke in his interview of his own calling and gifting to be a preacher. He also spoke of the importance of developing younger or newer preachers through modelling good preaching and through affirming them by giving them opportunities with significant responsibility to learn through doing and through collaboration with others.

I recognised that vocation was very much part of the discourse of ministerial development in the Methodist Church. Not surprisingly, most respondents spoke of their call to preach as having come from God, while recognising social influences such as advice or guidance from others to the effect that they ought or ought not to be

seeking a preaching ministry.<sup>24</sup> For these preachers the ‘call to preach’ had a strongly individual quality, and it would be inaccurate and theologically deficient to view such calling entirely, or even chiefly, in social terms. Nevertheless several respondents were able to locate a significant part of their calling and /or their early development as preachers in the effect on them of observing peers preaching who were of similar age, stage, and (occasionally) gender. Collaboration with peers in leadership tasks related to worship and preaching was also highly regarded by some. The value placed on this mode or locus of learning was significantly if not universally affirmed by the interviewees. On the other hand, there was no evidence of formal educational structures that had peer-assisted learning at their core. Instead it appears that there were *ad hoc* arrangements for collaboration.

Several were particularly appreciative of the confidence they gained through being given permission and entrusted with responsibility in leading worship, and this they felt fed into their development later as preachers. Being given responsibility before demonstrating competence imparts confidence, and confidence is an important precursor to acquiring competence. Being given responsibility, formally or informally, is also a way of conferring on the learner a status of legitimacy which, although peripheral, is important to the learning dynamic in these communities of agreed sermonic enterprise.

## **Conclusion**

The CASE concept has been suggested to me by an examination of the work of sociologists, but it will be apparent that CASE is a theological and not a sociological construct. It cannot be proved with social science, but has value as a paradigm for understanding and framing the learning experiences of preachers. It is presented with the training and practice of the church’s ministers very much in mind. What kind of theological basis and implications could the concept have? In my final chapter I will briefly reflect theologically on the nature of communities of agreed sermonic enterprise, before concluding with practical recommendations.

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<sup>24</sup> Clearly God’s guidance is presumed to be disclosed through the counsel of others. As discussed elsewhere, it is not my intention to imply any ‘quietism’ or metaphysical dualism which treats the physical, psychological and social worlds and their discourse as being in opposition to theological understandings and explanations.

## Chapter 10

### Final Reflections and Conclusions

If elephants can be trained to dance, lions to play, and leopards to hunt, surely preachers can be taught to preach.<sup>25</sup>

My thesis has been that concepts of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, along with recognition of role models and mentors, have a part to play in the life-long project that is learning to preach. Adult learning principles and cognitively oriented concepts are important, but an emphasis on didactic instruction can not only fail to teach preaching effectively but can impart deficient models of preaching practice. Socially grounded theories of learning contribute to a revision of the ‘community of practice’ that I have termed the community of agreed sermonic enterprise (CASE). A CASE may be viewed through six frames, and these frames have both arisen from my empirical studies and in an iterative way have enhanced the analysis of the data. In this concluding chapter I will consider the CASE concept from several theological perspectives, seeking to outline the religious and ethical shape and reach of the concept. I follow this with a series of ten practical recommendations for the enhancement and enabling of the experience of learning to preach in the church today.

#### ***Theological reflections***

A community of agreed sermonic enterprise is not a secular grouping, whose concern is wealth creation, or self-advancement or protection of the *polis*, nor is it a kinship group based on biological families. It is based on and part of *koinonia* (κοινωνία) – the gathered church – and must therefore both mirror and be a sub-set of the community practices of the church. A community oriented expression of Christian practice has been described as:

Things Christian people do together over time to address  
fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of  
God’s active presence for the life of the world ... in Jesus  
Christ.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, quoted by Roland Herbert Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 323.

<sup>26</sup> Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, 'A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices', in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. by M. Volf and D.C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 18. The definition is taken from an earlier book edited by Bass but “strengthened by the addition of the words ‘in Jesus Christ’ at the end,” as explained in *ibid.*, footnote 3, p. 18. See Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

This has of course been extensively explored in practical theology, drawing on traditions of moral philosophy such as Alasdair MacIntyre's "social practices" and the theories of the social sciences advanced by Kathryn Tanner and Pierre Bourdieu et al., describing how practices contribute to the production of meaning by communities.<sup>27</sup> The community of agreed sermonical enterprises can – indeed it must – draw on the appropriate theological traditions in order to express fully its nature as an enterprise that has at its heart the Word of God heard and acted upon by the people of God.

Being heard and acted upon by the people – and not merely individuals – is central to Charles Campbell's examination of preaching and his assertion that central to the enterprise is the formation or "building up" of the Church. His theory, drawing on the postliberal theology of George Lindbeck, and Hans Frei's idea of the "cultural-linguistic" turn in the understanding of Christianity, assumes that "the fundamental need of persons is to be faithful disciples in a truthful community."<sup>28</sup> More of a (in his words) postmodern than a modern approach to preaching, it prioritises the community in contrast to the individualism of much preaching, and its concerns with the individual's experience, salvation, blessing etc. For him, drawing again on Alasdair MacIntyre for the concept of practice, preaching is "a practice of constituting a people."<sup>29</sup> He then moves to a critique of the institutional training of preachers which draws on an article by Ronald Cram and Stanley Saunders, who suggest that seminaries characteristically deny time and space to the communal practice of "building up" (and in which preaching should be participating). For this reason he concludes:

Preaching cannot be taught ..[but] preachers can be formed. And this formation, as Cram and Saunders argue, is a communal process involving concrete practices; the process is much closer to the model of apprenticeship and the practice of building up the church than it is to current models of teaching homiletical method within discrete preaching classes.<sup>30</sup>

Campbell's critique is located in the American experience, and came after around 25 years of the 'New Homiletic.' It is less applicable to the experience of ministry

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<sup>27</sup> Dykstra and Bass, 'Practicing Theology', p. 20. They cite Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1985), and Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), footnote 3, p. 222.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.



training in the UK, where as noted earlier in this dissertation, there is far less in the way of homiletics in theological colleges. Nevertheless, his emphasis on community in both a theology and a pedagogy of preaching makes an important contribution to my thesis.

At the end of this chapter, I propose ten practices, or enhancements to existing practice, to improve the learning experience of the preacher and of the extended community of sermon enterprise in which her or his learning takes place. What must underpin these programmes is the recognition that theological education and ministerial formation of leaders require, as L. Gregory Jones expressed it, “the ongoing integration of practices, beliefs and desires through communal settings that emphasize catechesis, critical reflection and faithful living in the world.”<sup>31</sup> The focus of his chapter is on what the seminary or college can provide in this, but he stresses that many parts of the formation take place, as they do within the community of agreed sermonic enterprise, in the forming church of the student *before* seminary, and in the forming congregations being served *after* seminary. Jones’s analysis provides, I believe, a model for a thoroughgoing examination of all aspects of the formation of Christian leaders, but I am drawing on it to derive concepts to enhance and to ground, theologically, the concept of the community of agreed sermonic enterprise and its six frames developed in chapter 9.

### **Seven facets of a CASE**

The CASE is first of all a community of **word and action**. It is church being gathered around the word of God as that word is ‘broken open’ for the nourishment, strengthening and healing of the community and the empowerment of its mission. Whether this is understood from an extreme Barthian, logosomatic position,<sup>32</sup> or O.C. Edwards’ more social-descriptive definition,<sup>33</sup> the Word of God (*logos*) proceeds towards movement and transformation. The words spoken are an action by the preacher with the aim of being effective, persuasive speech. Words that are generated from other motives, that are not ‘fit for purpose,’ that only exist to divert, flatter, browbeat or entertain, that have the effect of devaluing the currency of speech or worse, should be guarded and restrained by the community. Yet at the end of human words is the silent adoration of Christ, the living Word, where our words and our earthly actions will cease.

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<sup>31</sup> L. Gregory Jones, ‘Beliefs, Desires, Practices, and the Ends of Theological Education’ in Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology*, p. 188.

<sup>32</sup> I cited Barth’s definition in ch. 1, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in ch. 1, p. 18.

A CASE must enable and further **interdependent independence**. It will recognise that it is composed of individuals who are on adult learning trajectories but who are engaged in practices that are in Nieman's words "common, meaningful, strategic and purposeful."<sup>34</sup> There are tensions in this that can be creative, and there are conflicts that can be destructive. Cognitive dissonance is an aid to learning, and this can occur when the individual's schemata for understanding do not align with the practices and expectations of the course, mentor, peer practitioner or congregation. At such times the learner's independence as an adult learner may feel threatened, but his or her sense of identity as a member of the body of Christ must grow to accommodate the learning process rather than be abandoned.

Thirdly, the CASE will be **generously orthodox**,<sup>35</sup> faithfully and correctly handling the doctrines and beliefs of the church while allowing the freedom to "do theology locally" in response to the culture in which the church is called to serve and to proclaim the gospel. It will recognise that conceptual approaches to religion (its doctrines and beliefs) and individualist experiential approaches (personal salvation and therapeutic concerns) are incomplete without the understanding of religion as a social phenomenon, interpreted through a "cultural-linguistic model" of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> What Campbell describes as the friendship practices of the Christian Community<sup>37</sup> must contribute to a generous orthodoxy as well as a loving orthopraxis.

Allied to this is the call for preaching that is **traditionally innovative**. Over two thousand years of Christian preaching gives a legacy that is rich, but can be felt as constrictive in the face of many changed cultural forms. Conversely, the increasing awareness of the world church provides so many diverse models for preaching that one can be paralysed by the choice. Preachers are called to be faithful to the traditions but they are also called to be open to new, culturally attuned formats. In Lischer's words quoted earlier in chapter 1, revivals in preaching have occurred and

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<sup>34</sup> I have explored this in chapter 2, pp. 24-25.

<sup>35</sup> From the challenging and evocative phrase claimed by both the noted Episcopal preacher Fleming Rutledge, see <http://www.generousorthodoxy.org/> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009], and by Brian D. McLaren pastor, author and figurehead of the Emerging Church movement, see Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 1st edn (London: SPCK, 1984). This model, along with its development in Hans Frei's work is explored in homiletical terms by Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*.

<sup>37</sup> Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, p. 41.

will continue to occur that mean a “re-forming of its methods of presentation.”<sup>38</sup> And here it is worth reflecting on Campbell’s critique of the New Homiletic and new models of preaching:

A genuinely ‘new hearing’ of the gospel will require more than the technique of the preacher. It will require a disciplined community of hearers grounded in the practice of Scripture, sacrament and discipleship.<sup>39</sup>

Fifthly, the CASE prioritises **character formation**. Within the dynamic of Christian education, as alluded to in the preceding chapter, the community seeks to further personal growth of all its living members in Christ. To name explicitly that which has been several times explored and emphasised in this study (as James Nieman wrote):

Learning to preach includes, as a necessary and vital component, being shaped by the practice in one’s own character and faith.<sup>40</sup>

There can be nothing nominal or superficial about preaching, neither for hearers of the word (who must not be “merely hearers who deceive themselves”<sup>41</sup>) nor for the preacher, whose character, as I have explored in chapter 1, is critical in the preparation and expression of the preached word. Furthermore this formation within community derives from a deeply Trinitarian understanding of community. Wardlaw again:

This grounding of personal growth and development in a community setting reflective of the unity of the Trinity is foundational for the learning of preaching.<sup>42</sup>

Sixthly, a CASE should be **graciously reflexive**. The community’s aim is strategic, to achieve better preaching, and reflection on practice is an indispensable part of the learning cycle. It requires mentors, peers and congregations who are open with the preacher. They should not wound with indiscriminate criticism, but they must be free with feedback, especially of the neutral but powerfully informative kind which states, “such-and-such is what I was hearing when you were preaching.” This also requires an open-ness on the part of the preacher, to hear and receive such ‘reflections’ coming back from the sermon, and to be able to reflect honestly on that feedback.

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<sup>38</sup> Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, p. xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, p. 247.

<sup>40</sup> Nieman, 'Why the Idea of Practice Matters', p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> James 1:22

<sup>42</sup> Wardlaw and Baumer, *Learning Preaching*, p. 19.

Finally (but not exhaustively) the CASE is engaged in developing **enhanced performance**. It is practice that matters, practice that must be assessed, and not only issues of hermeneutics, of intention and of integrity. It may be argued that a sermon is not a sermon until it is heard, and the rhetorical branch of the homiletics curriculum, concerned with how a hearing is effected, should be supported by churches. This takes place when churches are forming young Christians who can be articulate about their faith before receiving a vocation to preach. It also takes place when congregations form preachers by, for example, making it clear what kinds of sermons are appropriate to the spiritual growth and missionary calling of that church. Preaching was called “a lively art” by Joseph Sittler<sup>43</sup> and, in the words of David Schlafer “kindling art.”<sup>44</sup> Yet the experience of contemporary preaching, as I noted in my Introduction, can fall far short of this. Perhaps, as William Willimon remarked, “congregations get the preachers they deserve.”<sup>45</sup> Countering this, an enhanced expectation for preaching can contribute to the formation of men and women who, guided and filled by the Spirit, are able to participate in an enhanced performance of preaching.

### ***Recommendations and connections***

The research for my thesis has encompassed theoretical explorations in education and homiletics and three empirical studies of active preachers in Protestant UK traditions. This research has also built on my experience of contributing to training programmes in the mainline denominations of these traditions, and on the earlier research work of the VOX Project at the Centre for Christian Communication. Convinced that the training and development of ministers as preachers could be improved, I offer the following ten recommendations. They are relevant to the life-long task of learning to preach and to the educational institutions working to facilitate that task, and are related to the six frames through which the community of sermonic enterprise should be viewed.

### **Theology of preaching**

The first frame, recognising the teaching of preaching, also recognises the pedagogical limitation of most seminary instruction in preaching.<sup>46</sup> This has been

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Sittler, *The Anguish of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Schlafer, *Playing with Fire*.

<sup>45</sup> William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, 1st edn (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 135.

<sup>46</sup> Sittler again: “... the expectation must not be cherished that, save for modest and obvious instruction about voice, pace, organization and such matters, preaching as a lively art of the church

supported in my research by the low evaluation of instruction for the Church of Scotland ministers. Nevertheless this research recognises that a clear theology of preaching is necessary to enable an intelligent vocational commitment. Such a theology considers what preaching is for, why it is necessary, how God's word is heard through preaching, and what are the energies and stimuli available to the minister faced with weekly preaching commitments. This of course is not a substitute for nor meant to downplay the kind of knowing-in-action that I have argued for earlier. It is a recognition that students in training for ministry should be able to articulate a personal theology of preaching in order to demonstrate engagement with the calling to preach, and to do so with respect to the culture as well as the denomination in which they are being called to serve.

### **Voice training**

Again within the first frame of the CASE, my findings in the survey of Church of Scotland ministers suggest that the provision of voice and public speaking training can be improved in some institutions. My own experience suggests that it should be offered with greater consideration of individual student needs, including therapeutic requirements where appropriate. It is important to instil current best practice for voice care as well as for voice production. Ideally this will involve the engagement of a professional voice coach to work for at the very least one session one-on-one with the student, early in their career of public speaking. For the Church of Scotland this should be in addition to prescribed training in public speaking that is already being offered to good effect to many candidates.

### **Recognising adult learning**

Adult learning is central of course to the second frame of a CASE. Adult learning principles that were discussed in chapter 2 should be recognised where adult teaching is taking place. Learning opportunities should be placed as far as possible in situations where the adult learner is neither dis-empowered and de-skilled, nor implicitly encouraged to feel that their past experience is irrelevant to their present training or future ministry. Such life and professional experience may be considerable in the case of mature men and women offering themselves for ministry. The 'pitcher and funnel' or banking approach to education is singularly inappropriate with such students and such subject matter.

Teaching across the curriculum must frequently demonstrate the relevance to

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can be taught at all. And therefore, seminary provisions for instructions in preaching, when these exist as separate curriculum items, should be re-examined." (Sittler, *The Anguish of Preaching*, p. 7.)

practical problems and situations encountered in ministry, especially for learners who are not drawn to theorising and knowledge acquisition for its own sake. This includes not only homiletics and biblical studies but subjects such as systematics and ethics, where students could be given the opportunity to ask the question, “How might this be preached?”

For younger adults learning preaching, the important principle of being given responsibility before demonstrating competence should be realised in active apprentice-like situations, where there are leaders who are prepared to ‘take the heat’ when things go wrong. Only in such ways can they safely move from stages of “legitimate peripheral participation” to full membership in the “company of preachers.”

### **Self-reflection in learning**

Candidates for ministry should be trained, as many already are, in the pastoral cycle of action – reflection – theorising and helped by supervisor, mentor or coach to self-reflection on learning, leading to skills of competence assessment and critical self-appraisal, along with lowered levels of defensiveness. This will enable developed sermon evaluation techniques, profitable to self and others. Along with this there must be recognition that the types of knowing-in-action required in good preaching are not always susceptible to the kind of technical rationality assumed by step-by-step sermon preparation models and sometimes demanded by the gatekeepers in the academy.

### **Gender studies**

A further consideration located in the second frame of the CASE is the issue of how genders learn in different ways. The research has identified a need for further research in gender studies and in women’s studies into the development of UK ministers. There are important pedagogical understandings that must be gained by asking the question, how do women ministers learn preaching differently, especially from role models, from mentors and in peer learning situations? Ideally these will be based on how women value preaching as it is done in their communities of practice. This is related to the question that arises from the Church of Scotland survey: to what extent and in what ways do women understand preaching and their preaching task differently from men, and how do these understandings affect the way they learn to preach?

## **Recognising role models**

As discussed in chapter 3, role models are a prominent part of the third frame of the CASE, the ‘cloud of witnesses’ shaping and influencing the learner preacher. Candidates for ministry in training should be encouraged as early as possible to consider consciously their attitudes and receptivity towards role models and towards those who can give them wise and sound mentoring and coaching. This would overlap with other aspects of the spiritual formation of the minister and other ministerial roles being developed. In particular they should be encouraged and helped to recognise their preaching role models, not only in recent experience but particularly during early periods of their formation as Christians. Forms of imitation, as recognised in Allan Demond’s work on Schön’s concepts of the reflective practitioner,<sup>47</sup> should be developed and encouraged. They will also benefit from being shielded somewhat from the prevailing individualism that pressures a preacher to be original before they can have the experience and maturity to develop their own authentic ‘preaching voice.’

## **Mentoring to induct**

Within the fourth frame of the CASE, this research affirms the value of mentors giving not only coaching instruction and enabling reflection on practice, but induction into the more subtle values, expectations and codes of preaching conduct. As discussed in chapter 4, communities of practice that are educationally beneficial provide mentors who are able to impart wisdom and constructive criticism. It would be preferable (though it may be impractical) to separate these mentoring roles from evaluative assessment designed to have a bearing on the student’s professional progress and future ministerial appointments. The degree to which a positive mentoring experience depends on ‘personal chemistry’ must be recognised and allowances made for this in institutional pedagogic structures. Finally, based on some of the findings in the first field study, there is an argument for encouraging the formation and prioritising the provision of mentoring relationships for women in preaching development programmes.

## **Supervision in placements**

Following on from this, where institutions must organise the provision of mentoring, many supervisory ministers need induction into mentoring preaching students and some would benefit from explicit training in best practices of homiletical education.

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<sup>47</sup> Cited in ch. 2, pp. 48-49.

This could be part of a clear identification and description of a homiletical curriculum that is appropriate to the denomination but also flexible enough to meet the needs of students coming from contrasting backgrounds in preaching and with variable experiences, theological orientations and vocations. Promulgating theories of psychological type and particularly the work of Leslie Francis, as outlined in chapter 2, could be of great benefit to candidates and the supervisory ministers with whom they are placed. Sermon evaluation strategies taught in homiletics class are immensely enhanced when shared with an experienced mentor, and should become a standard feature of ministerial reflection on practice during placements and later supervised ministry.

### **Peer-assisted learning**

Emphasised by the fifth frame of the CASE, there should be the recognition of the value of peer-oriented structures in theological education and ministerial development, and establishment of systems to encourage their organic growth. Natural and deep peer relationships are of course harder to form outside of the residential training model that is becoming increasingly outmoded and expensive. Therefore in homiletics courses a particular effort should be made to incorporate practical workshops giving primacy to delivery of sermons with a small group of students as a congregation. Feedback from the students should be structured and elicited for wise counsel and compassionate encouragement as well as academic commitment and fair criticism given to the student. Collaborative working experiences, such as the worship service planning so appreciated by the Methodist workers at Elm Hall Drive Church, and sermon pre-planning groups should be regularly required of all candidates for ministry during pre-ordination training.

### **Congregations as educators**

Finally, there should be a greater appreciation among new ministers of the role of the congregation in inducting the preacher into the CASE. This begins to recognise the ways in which approval and disapproval, responses and non-responses can and should shape a preacher's theological standpoint, hermeneutic approaches and rhetorical strategies. Intentional ways of gaining congregational feedback should be taught in courses. Supervising ministers during placements should teach and model skills in exegeting congregation and culture. Collaborative styles of leadership being taught in seminary should be extended to include an understanding of preaching as a collaborative project. Through programmes, schemes and overt overtures placement



congregations also need to be included and woven into the community of agreed sermon enterprise.

### ***Concluding remarks***

The making of a preacher is a complex and long-term process that is unlikely to be fully explained in any one sphere of academic investigation and without a range of theoretical constructs. In sociological terms the functions of the church's faithful preachers are as varied as any other human occupation. These functions and practices are located in a tensile web of dynamic relations between different stakeholders. Such webs frustrate localised analyses and resist isolated modular changes. In theological terms the human agency of the preacher and his or her ability to produce sermons must always be balanced with God's actions in revealing the Word to the Church, and God calls whom he will to be a part of that self-revelatory process. God's servants are called, tested and nourished in church structures, and yet they are forged in furnaces of holy fire, and in ways that are sometimes hidden from all, including the minister. In rhetorical and aesthetic terms, good preaching is about as indefinable as good art, and the creativity as well as linguistic skills that feed into good preaching continue to flower in unexpected people in unpredictable ways. In epistemological terms, the kinds of knowing-in-action exercised in preaching will resist a Positivist attempt to pin down the butterfly. In cultural terms the relationship of church and society is played out on shifting sands and ever-changing backdrops, so that the effective communicators of one age seem to lose the larger part of their ability to communicate in another, different age. The effective preacher will have a kind of cultural intelligence that can read the signs of the times.

My thesis has attempted to chart some of that social and cultural territory, even while it moves under our feet, by analysing empirical evidence from a range of preachers working in the early twenty-first century. I have concentrated my analysis on a tiny sector of the world-wide church, and would hesitate to claim universal validity for these findings. The work has been conducted in a British context where preaching continues to face relegation to a lower tier of optional or less valued ministries. Yet God continues to call ministers to serve the church and to enable the church to serve the world. Placed upon them and undertaken with obedience is the charge to proclaim the Good News of Christ and to teach God's ways and purposes. These ministers are almost never brought fully formed into a pulpit or before the microphone. The church is charged with developing and assisting its preachers along the life-long educational trajectory that is learning to preach. To do this it must create

structures, however provisional, that bring students into close contact with preacher-teachers who will be role models and mentors, it must authorise and expect women and men to work collaboratively, sharing different gifts as members of the Body of Christ, and it must expect new forms of homiletical communication that reveal God's unchanging nature and eternal purposes. This is a very great deal to expect from an institution made up of all-too-fallible humans, but it is an institution that has from age to age shown signs of renewal, reformation and re-invention that could only have come from the Spirit of God.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Research Ethics**

#### ***Statement of research ethics assessment***

In keeping with the School of Divinity Research Ethics Policy and Procedures, a Level One Assessment / Review was undertaken by myself as Principal Investigator and overseen by the Supervisor for the research, Dr Jolyon Mitchell, and dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007. No problematic or foreseeable ethical risks were identified, and it was therefore deemed sufficient to review the research at Level One.

All three field studies contained data and personal privacy assurances conveyed to potential contributors, and these may be found in the relevant appendices, following.

## Ethics (Self) Assessment Form



**SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
ETHICS IN RESEARCH COMMITTEE  
ETHICS (SELF) ASSESSMENT FORM: LEVEL ONE**

Level One Ethics (Self) assessment is normally to be carried out by the Principal Investigator. For Honours and taught Masters students this is done by the dissertation supervisor on behalf of the programme manager. For MTh/MSc by research and PhD students the assessment is carried out by the first supervisor. For Post-doctoral Fellows this is done in collaboration with the mentor who is responsible for confirming that it has been carried out.

**Title of Project:** Learning Preaching

**Funding Body (if applicable):**

**Principal Invest./ Supervisor/ Prog. Manager name:** Rev. Dr Jolyon Mitchell

**Student name and matriculation Number:** Geoffrey Stevenson - s0566195

**Type of student:** ☒ **PhD** ☒ **Masters by Research**  
☐ **Taught Masters** ☐ **Honours**

**Protection of research subject confidentiality**

Are there any issues of confidentiality which are not adequately handled by the normal tenets of ethical academic research?

**NO**

**YES**

*If yes, Level Two Ethics review required*

These include mutually understood agreements about:

- Non attribution of individual responses
- Individuals and organisations being anonymised in publications and presentations, if requested
- Feedback to collaborators, rights to edit responses, and intellectual property rights and publication

**Data protection and Consent**

Are issues of data handling and consent dealt with adequately and following procedures?

**NO**

**YES**

*If No, Level Two Ethics review required*

For example:

- Will respondents consent be sought regarding the collection of personal data?
- Are there special issues about informed consent or confidentiality in this case?
- Is the research compliant with UOE procedures ([www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk](http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk))

## Ethics (Self) Assessment Form, page 2

### Moral Issues and Researcher/Institutional Conflicts of Interest

Do any special moral issues/conflicts of interest arise?

NO

YES

If yes, Level Two Ethics review required

For example:

- Might the researcher compromise the research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for her/himself or for a relative or friend?
- Are there particular moral issues or concerns that may arise, for example where the purposes of the research are concealed, where respondents are unable to provide informed consent or where research findings impinge negatively or differentially upon the interests of participants?
- Does the research involve vulnerable persons such as children, institutionalised persons or others entitled to protection and special procedures to protect their interests?

### Potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort, or stress

Is there significant foreseeable potential for psychological harm or stress for those involved in your research?

YES

NO

Is there significant foreseeable potential for physical harm or stress for those involved in your research?

YES

NO

Is there significant foreseeable risk to the researcher?

YES

NO

If YES to any section, Level Two Ethics Review required

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT

SELF AUDIT HAS BEEN CONDUCTED?

YES

NO

Were any risks identified?

YES

NO

Is Level Two Ethics Assessment required?

YES

NO

Signature of Applicant:

Date: 01/09/07

Principal Investigator or Scrutineer (supervisor, programme manager, mentor) either:

1. emails research office ([K.McLean@ed.ac.uk](mailto:K.McLean@ed.ac.uk)) following text: "I confirm that I have carried out the School Level One Ethics (Self) Assessment in relation to the proposed research project [insert project name, student name if applicable, and Funding Body if applicable] and that no reasonably foreseeable ethical risks have been identified."

OR

2. Completes a Level Two Ethics Assessment form and submits it to the Ethics In Research Committee via the research office ([K.McLean@ed.ac.uk](mailto:K.McLean@ed.ac.uk)) for a decision.

*John P. Mitchell*

## Appendix 2: Field Study 1

### ***Appendix 2.1: Invitation to participate***

**Subject:** RE: [Fwd: Re: [Fwd: RE: preaching research]]

**From:** "DAVIDSON, DOROTHY"

**Date:** Mon, 5 Nov 2007 11:54:11 -0000

**To:** "Geoffrey Stevenson"

Dear Geoffrey

Below you'll find what we sent out the first time:

The Ministries Council has agreed that Geoffrey Stevenson be allowed access to ministers in order to further his research at New College. The Council believes that the results of this research will also be helpful in the work that it is doing.

You will find below a link to a survey and I would be grateful if you could take the time to complete this as part of a pilot group and, if this pilot is successful, the survey will be sent out to as many ministers as we can cover from the central email database.

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=A7FJdSu7nud0Q4t8sqF96w\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=A7FJdSu7nud0Q4t8sqF96w_3d_3d)

The following was then sent to the rest of the Church of Scotland email list.

The Ministries Council agreed recently that Geoffrey Stevenson be allowed access to a pilot group of ministers in order to further his research at New College. The results of this research will also be helpful in the work that the Council is doing. This "pilot project" has been successful and we now wish the survey to be sent out to as many ministers as we can cover from the central email database.

We would be grateful if those of you who took part in the pilot group do not complete the survey again, but we will be doing a follow-up in the near future to ask for your assistance.

The link to the survey is given below and we would be grateful if you could take the time to complete this.

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=IFC2vOUwsfFiNcdPw5kGDA\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=IFC2vOUwsfFiNcdPw5kGDA_3d_3d).

Thank you.

**Dorothy M Davidson**  
**Senior Administrator**  
**Ministries Council**  
[tel] 0131 225 5722, ext 353

## Appendix 2.2 New College Homiletics Class 1<sup>st</sup> Questionnaire

(Given out at the beginning of the course, 27/09/05)

### Learning Preaching Questionnaire

or, The pedagogy of homiletics in ministerial formation

This research is being carried out by Geoffrey Stevenson for a research project being supervised jointly by New College School of Divinity and Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh University.

All responses will be reviewed under conditions of strict anonymity. Taking part in this survey is optional, it is in no way assessed nor does it form any part of the requirements of any course in which the student is enrolled.

For more details, please contact Geoffrey Stevenson  
s0566195@sms.ed.ac.uk or Tel 07787 517812

#### Gender:

Female ☐

Male ☐

#### Age:

18-25 ☐

26-35 ☐

36-45 ☐

46+ ☐

#### How many times have you preached?

Never ☐

Between 1 and 5 times ☐

> 5, less than 20 ☐

20 or more ☐

#### Denomination

C of S ☐

other ☐ (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### Country of Residence

Scotland ☐

England or  
Wales ☐

Northern  
Ireland ☐

Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### My learning priorities as a (student) preacher

1= Essential 2= Important 3=fairly relevant 4=slightly relevant 5 = not relevant or not applicable

	Over the next 3 months					In my long-term growth as a preacher				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6 Ability to exegete a biblical text	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Ability to discern a message to preach from a biblical passage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Biblical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Develop pastoral understanding of the people I preach to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Develop interpretive understanding of the culture of the people I preach to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Storytelling ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 Holiness and personal integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 Ability to argue apologetically in defence of the Christian faith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 Ability to explain systematic theology / doctrine in the pulpit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 Confidence in public speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 Improving my voice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17 Learning to care for my voice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

27.09.2005

1

EH\_Q1

## Influences

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3=Neutral 4=Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree

		1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
18	"Preaching seems to be very important in the life of the local church which I consider 'home' at the moment."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	"I have heard preachers in my life whom I particularly admire and through whose preaching of God has spoken to me."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19a	Names and churches of 1 or 2 of these: (Optional)	<hr/>				
20	"I expect to (or already do) model my preaching on their example."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	"My mental construct of what makes a good sermon is based on the sermons I have heard from these preachers."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Have any of these ever mentored, coached, commented on or directly advised you on your preaching?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>			
23	If so, rate their influence on you as active mentors (leave blank if not applicable)	Strongly positive <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly positive <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly negative <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly negative <input type="checkbox"/>

**24. Please describe briefly your image of a "good sermon"-  
this may refer to structure, style, content, length, etc.**

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### Learning / Teaching Styles

How do you think the following learning / teaching styles help you?

1= Vital 2= Important 3=Neutral 4=Discouraging 5= Very unhelpful

	1 Vital	2 Important	3 Neutral	4 Discouraging	5 Very unhelpful
25 Shown examples of good preaching, then expected to imitate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26 Shown examples of preaching, then analyse in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27 Having principles explained	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28 Practical exercise followed by peer comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29 Practical exercise followed by tutor comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 Written exams that encourage integration of thinking and develop depth of understanding, followed by a mark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31 Marker's comments on exam	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32 Knowing where I stand in my preaching abilities in relation to the rest of the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Learning Styles - II

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3=Neutral 4=Disagree 5= Strongly disagree

	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
33 "I benefit most from sermons when I can picture, imagine, or form mental images of what I am aiming at."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34 "I benefit most from sermons when I can verbalise or it is explained to me what I am aiming at."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35 "I benefit most from sermons when I have stories illustrating the central points."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36 "I like to see the main argument or central theme of a sermon being preached to me."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37 "I like to see how what the preacher is saying works in particular examples, instances and applications."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you very much indeed for your participation in this research!

Questionnaire Reference Number:

EH

Favourite film:

A Pet's Name:

27.09.2005

4

EH\_Q1



## Appendix 2.3 New College Homiletics Class 2<sup>nd</sup> Questionnaire

(Given out at the end of the course, 29/11/05)

### Learning Preaching Questionnaire – Part 2

This research is being carried out by Geoffrey Stevenson for a research project being supervised jointly by New College School of Divinity and Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh University.  
All responses will be reviewed under conditions of strict anonymity. Taking part in this survey is optional, it is in no way assessed nor does it form any part of the requirements of any course in which the student is enrolled.

For more details, please contact Geoffrey Stevenson  
s0566195@sms.ed.ac.uk or Tel 07787 517812

Questionnaire Reference Number:  
(from September questionnaire)

EH \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. Learning Priorities

At the end of this term's course at New College, how do you **now** value the following subject areas in your process of learning to preach?

- 1= Essential  
2= Highly Important  
3= Less Important

- |  | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Confidence in public speaking  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Improving my voice   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Learning to care for my voice  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Ability to argue apologetically in defence of the Christian faith            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Ability to explain systematic theology / doctrine in the pulpit              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Storytelling ability   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 Holiness and personal integrity  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 Ability to exegete a biblical text   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 Ability to discern a message to preach from a biblical passage               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 Biblical knowledge  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 Develop pastoral understanding of the people I preach to                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 Develop interpretive understanding of the culture of the people I preach to | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### 2. A good sermon

Please outline one or two ways in which your view of a good sermon has significantly changed or developed since this course began. You may wish to refer to the answer that you gave in September. You might consider:

Strategy / approach / preparation? Construction or forms employed? Issues of delivery? Desired response or impact or effect? Your understanding of what a "successful" sermon would be and how to assess that?

*Thank you again for your participation in this research!*

29.11.05

EH\_Q2

## Appendix 2.4 Lichfield Diocese Training Day Questionnaire

Date of administration: 26/01/2006

### Learning Preaching Questionnaire

This research is being carried out by Geoffrey Stevenson for a research project being supervised jointly by New College School of Divinity and Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh University.  
All responses will be reviewed under conditions of strict anonymity. Taking part in this survey is optional, it is in no way assessed nor does it form any part of the requirements of any course in which the student is enrolled.

For more details, please contact Geoffrey Stevenson  
s0566195@sms.ed.ac.uk or Tel 07787 517812

<b>Gender:</b> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Age</b> _____ yrs.
<b>How many times have you preached?</b> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Between 1 and 5 times <input type="checkbox"/> > 5, less than 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 20 or more <input type="checkbox"/>	

#### 1. Learning Priorities

How do you **now** value the following subject areas in your process of learning to preach?

- 1= Essential to study actively  
2= Highly Important  
3= Less Important or will come with time

	1	2	3
1 Confidence in public speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Improving my voice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Learning to care for my voice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Ability to argue apologetically in defence of the Christian faith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Ability to explain systematic theology / doctrine in the pulpit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Storytelling ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Holiness and personal integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Ability to exegete a biblical text	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Ability to discern a message to preach from a biblical passage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Biblical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Develop pastoral understanding of the people I preach to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 Develop interpretive understanding of the culture of the people I preach to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3

27.01.06

LDQ1

## Influences

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3=Neutral 4=Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree

		1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
18	"Preaching seems to be very important in the life of the local church where I serve."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	"I have heard preachers in my life whom I particularly admire and through whose preaching of God has spoken to me."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19a	Names and churches of 1 or 2 of these: (Optional)	<hr/>				
20	"I expect to (or already do) model my preaching on their example."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	"My mental construct of what makes a good sermon is based on the sermons I have heard from these preachers."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Have any of these ever mentored, coached, commented on or directly advised you on your preaching?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>			
23	If so, rate their influence on you as active mentors (leave blank if not applicable)	Strongly positive <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly positive <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly negative <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly negative <input type="checkbox"/>

## 2. A good sermon

Please describe briefly your image of a "good sermon."

*You might consider:*

*Strategy / approach / preparation; Construction or forms employed; Issues of delivery; Desired response or impact or effect; Your understanding of what a "successful" sermon would be and how to assess that.*

### Learning / Teaching Styles

How do you think the following learning / teaching styles help you?

1= Vital 2= Important 3=Neutral 4=Discouraging 5 = Very unhelpful

	1 Vital	2 Important	3 Neutral	4 Discouraging	5 Very unhelpful
25 Shown examples of good preaching, then expected to imitate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26 Shown examples of preaching, then analyse in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27 Having principles explained	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28 Practical exercise followed by peer comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29 Practical exercise followed by tutor comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 Written exams that encourage integration of thinking and develop depth of understanding, followed by a mark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31 Marker's comments on exam	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32 Knowing where I stand in my preaching abilities in relation to the rest of the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Learning Styles - II

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3=Neutral 4=Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree

	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
33 "I benefit most from sermons when I can picture, imagine, or form mental images of what I am aiming at."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34 "I benefit most from sermons when I can verbalise or it is explained to me what I am aiming at."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35 "I benefit most from sermons when I have stories illustrating the central points."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36 "I like to see the main argument or central theme of a sermon being preached to me."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37 "I like to see how what the preacher is saying works in particular examples, instances and applications."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you very much indeed for your participation in this research!

27.01.06

LDQ1

### Example of the Church of Scotland ministers on-line questionnaire

Page 1

**7. Please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Can't remember
"The ordained ministers whom I most admired were notable for their preaching."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have heard preachers in my life whom I particularly admired and through whose preaching God has spoken to me."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have heard preachers in my life on whose theology I have tended to model my own preaching."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have heard preachers in my life on whose style of preaching I have tended to model my own preaching."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have heard preachers in my life whose sermons have given me a template or pattern for the sermons I preach."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**8. Have any preachers whom you would describe as role models for you ever mentored, coached, commented on or directly advised you on your preaching?**

☐ Yes  
☐ No

**9. If so, how would you rate their influence as mentors to you?**

	Strongly positive	Fairly positive	Neutral	Slightly negative	Strongly negative	N/A
Choose one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you anything you would like to add?

**10. Please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Can't remember
"Preaching has always formed a significant part of my vocation."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"When I looked forward to ordained ministry in the church, I saw myself first and foremost as a preacher."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Learning Preaching Survey - Final

**11. If you wish, please feel free to add any other significant influences on the way you now preach that you can trace back to before training for the ministry.**

1	
2	
3	

## 3. Ordination Training

Formative influences during formal education

**12. Have you had anyone in a formal educational relationship who has mentored, coached, or directly and personally evaluated you on your preaching?**

☐ Yes  
☒ No

**13. If so, how would you rate their influence as mentors to you?**

	Strongly positive	Fairly positive	Neutral	Slightly negative	Strongly negative	N/A
Choose one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**14. How would you rate the following factors or experiences during ministry training on your formation as a preacher**

	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Neither helpful nor unhelpful	Quite unhelpful	Very unhelpful, destructive or negative	N/A or Never happened
Giving a sermon in placement church with feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving a sermon followed by tutor or mentor feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hearing sermons preached by staff and visiting ministers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading assigned books and articles on preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lectures on practice (the "how to") of preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving a sermon followed by peer feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being shown examples of preaching, followed by analysis in classroom setting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hearing sermons preached by fellow candidates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video or audio recording of own preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lectures on theology of preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voice and public speaking training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Learning Preaching Survey - Final

**15. If you wish, please briefly state any other training influences on your preaching you found significantly helpful.**

1

2

**16. ... or significantly disruptive.**

1

2

#### 4. Post-ordination and life-long learning

Formative influences following ordination

**17. Please rate the degree of helpfulness of the following as they have affected your formation as a preacher SINCE you were ordained:**

	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Neither helpful nor unhelpful	Quite unhelpful	Very unhelpful / destructive	N/A
Sermons you have read	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Degree level courses or certification programmes in preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Short courses in preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Books and / or articles specifically on preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conferences, seminars or workshops focussed on preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues' and peers' comments on your preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Congregational responses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**18. If you wish, please add any post-ordination influences on your preaching that you found significantly helpful.**

1

2

#### 5. Preaching within ministry

"Most ministers of Word and Sacrament are recognised for their distinctive roles within the Church, which include:

- the celebration of the sacraments - the Lord's Supper (or Holy Communion) and baptism;
- preaching;
- chairing meetings of the kirk session, which has responsibility for the spiritual issues within a congregation, and guiding the session in its discussions;
- conducting funerals and offering pastoral support to those who are dying and to people who have been bereaved;
- conducting weddings and helping people prepare for marriage."

(From the Church of Scotland website: <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ministry/ministryroles.htm>)



# Learning Preaching Survey - Final

**19. Taking into account the realities of day-to-day ministry, and being perhaps unable to do as much as you would like, please rank these roles according to your own sense of priority and the importance you place upon being able to fulfill each of these roles faithfully where you are currently serving. ("No 1" as the most important, "No. 2" your next priority, etc.)**

	No 1	No 2	No 3	No 4	No 5
• Celebration of sacraments / ministry of worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Ministry of the Word, including preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Chairing the kirk session and implementing its decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Conducting funerals and offering pastoral support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Conducting weddings and helping marriage preparation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other role (please specify if you wish)	<input type="text"/>				

## 6. Understanding of preaching - 1

The role and self-understanding of the preacher

**20. Please indicate how important you believe preaching to be:**

	Foundational	Very important	On a par with other ministries	Less important	Not important
Within the Sunday Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the totality of ministry within your church	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Church of Scotland's ministry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you wish, briefly specify your own understanding of preaching within the church (optional).

# Learning Preaching Survey - Final

**21. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements / metaphors for the preacher's role or activity in the Church as they apply to your ministry**

	Foundational for preaching	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Expositor - teaching and explaining systematically from Scripture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent - nurturing, protecting those for whom you have pastoral responsibility. Encouraging and correcting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guardian - or Steward, preserver of truth of doctrine and expounding it faithfully	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guide or Witness - accompanying others on journey from prior experience, having "gone on ahead and come back"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prophet - Engaging with the structures of community and society to correct injustice or immorality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Herald - proclaiming from a position of authority the essentials of the faith and / or the kerygma of Jesus Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CEO - Chief executive officer addressing colleagues in order to motivate, inspire, share vision, build community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fool / Jester - Goading, irritating or probing; undermining narrow assumptions and comfortable prejudices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educator / Teacher - Explaining and helping listeners to understand and apply Christian principles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**22. If you wish, please add other one-word or two-word metaphors that are important to your understanding of preaching.**

1

2

## 7. Understanding of preaching - 2

View of sermon crafting and structure and rhetorical form and function

**23. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about the form or rhetoric of preaching:**

	Foundational for any sermon	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
A good sermon should or will often help listener to picture, imagine, or form mental images.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good sermon should or will often convey clearly how a Christian life can be lived, with practical examples.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good sermon should or will often have story and / or illustration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good sermon should or will often have clear arguments and one (or a small number of) central themes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Tell them what you are going to say, say it, then tell them what you have said."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Humour is useful in preaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preachers should never (or very rarely) disclose personal details from their own lives in their sermons.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use projected words, headings and quotations, etc. (with e.g. PowerPoint) to good effect in my preaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use projected images to good effect in my preaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If you wish, briefly specify your own understanding of preaching rhetoric.					
<input type="text"/>					

**8. Continuing Professional Development**

Nearly done!

**24. Which of the following areas of study / learning would benefit your preaching?**

	Essential for me to study or pursue actively	Important, but I expect this will come with time	Not a priority for me at this time	I don't consider this important for preaching
Ability to communicate systematic theology / doctrine in the pulpit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning to care for my voice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to argue apologetically in defence of the Christian faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voice projection and quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with visual aids (e.g. PowerPoint)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop interpretive understanding of the culture of the people for whom I preach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity in sermon construction and planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preaching in other media (e.g. 'blogging', pod-casts etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public speaking confidence and ability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop pastoral understanding of the people for whom I preach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to exegete Biblical text	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Storytelling ability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to discern a message to preach from the Biblical text	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holiness and personal integrity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with PA (public address) systems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biblical knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify if you wish)	<input type="text"/>			

Thank you very much indeed for your participation in this research!  
You will now be directed to the home page of the Church of Scotland Ministries Council.

## ***Appendix 2.6: Further methodological issues arising from Field Study 1***

### **Pilot questionnaires**

Edinburgh New College Homiletics Course and Lichfield Diocese Training Day

At the very beginning of my research I created a paper-based questionnaire<sup>1</sup> for students taking the course in Homiletics at New College, University of Edinburgh<sup>2</sup> in September 2005. Its aim was to uncover attitudes, preconceptions, prior experience, and elements of reflexive learning in preachers in formation. I particular I sought to identify a range of mental models of preaching, as I supposed that these would influence the learning process. Secondly, I tried to identify the range of admitted goals or aims in early preaching learning and training.

I also sought to identify preferences between course activities, classroom teaching techniques and learning methods, both theoretically and on offer in the course. Finally, I wanted to investigate the learning styles existing in the class, looking for students situating on the three continua of learning styles between Image and verbal, Holistic and Discrete, and Action and Reflection.<sup>3</sup>

Fifteen minutes were allowed for completion of the questionnaire. This allowed a comfortable period in which to reflect on the issues and answer the questions. The questions were mostly multiple-choice, with a small number of open questions. Allowing fewer than 10 minutes would have limited the number of questions that students could answer. More than 15 minutes could not be allowed as the questionnaire being completed in class time.

The students also took part at the end of the course in a short survey by questionnaire, one of the aims of which was to plot the development over the 3-month course their conceptions of learning and the perceived benefits from the course. This attempt at a longitudinal survey highlighted some of the practical difficulties of such a study in the population. Chief among these would have been the difficulty in identifying and gaining responses from a similar group over a useful period and yet within the time-scale of this doctoral research.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2.2 and 2.3 for a copy of this questionnaire.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding Research Ethics, the Questionnaire carried following information: "This research is being carried out by Geoffrey Stevenson for a research project being supervised jointly by New College School of Divinity and Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh University. All responses will be reviewed under conditions of strict anonymity. Taking part in this survey is optional, it is in no way assessed nor does it form any part of the requirements of any course in which the student is enrolled."

<sup>3</sup> I have explained these styles in ch. 2.

Continuing with my early pilot studies, a similar questionnaire<sup>4</sup> was designed and distributed to Anglican ministers on a short preaching course I was teaching for Lichfield Diocese in January 2006. Fifty-two responses were received, and the data was imported into SPSS along with that from the Edinburgh Homiletics course questionnaires. Frequency and descriptive tests were run and exploration of the data pointed up the questions that were not apparently clear or useful to the survey. (This was of course also a valuable way of learning to use the software and of coming to understand some of the statistical concepts necessary to interpret my data.)

It should be noted that the data from these two pilot questionnaires have *not* fed directly into the explorations and findings of this thesis. The main reason for this is the ‘dirty’ involvement of the researcher in the data collection process. Both pools of respondents had been taught by me, and there existed the strong possibility that some responses would be influenced by the unconscious ‘desire to please’ that can affect questionnaire respondents when they are able to associate questions with an understanding of the researcher’s views.

The survey was significantly revised following these pilots, and negotiations began with the Ministries Council of the Church of Scotland in 2007. The initial proposal comprised a survey of cohorts of ministers, in order to compare attitudes and approaches to learning preaching 5, 10, and 15 years after ordination and initial ministerial training. However, practical difficulties were recognised in identifying ministers in such cohorts and in collecting their mailing addresses. It was suggested that since 90% of the serving Church of Scotland ministers were, I was told, on e-mail, an electronic version of a questionnaire might be simpler and cheaper to administer. There was also the prospect of a much higher rate of return, due to the ease of completing the questionnaire without having to bother with envelope and posting.

In my negotiations I also offered to include in the survey questions that might aid the Ministries Council in their planning and provision of training. There were no specific requests from the Council, but Question 24 listed a number of areas and invited participants to comment on their value for present and future study. The strict anonymity assured to participants in the Introduction and guaranteed by the survey process meant that neither this nor any other question could affect the relationship of ministers with the Ministries Council.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2.4

I was guided by the computing services team at New College to an online survey site, [www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com) to host the questionnaire.

### **How SurveyMonkey works**

SurveyMonkey is an online paid service that holds versions of a subscriber's questionnaires for participants to fill in. Potential participants in a survey are emailed an invitation to fill in the survey by following a web link that will take them to the survey site, opening up the designated questionnaire at its first page. When each questionnaire is completed, the data is stored by the survey website. The site offers the questionnaire owner some basic analysis of the data, along with the option to download the collected data in a variety of formats. Many of the problems of paper-based questionnaires are overcome in this way, such as incomplete replies. Questions can be designated such that the questionnaire cannot be submitted without answers to these such questions. This is useful for ensuring that prime variables related to fact, such as gender, age, experience, etc. are always in place, even if the respondent chooses to skip more opinion-based questions. Their replies are held with only the IP address of the computer / ISP combination that they used to access the web site. This is not generally seen to compromise the anonymity of the participant in any significant way. Responses are collected and can be downloaded in a useful variety of formats. Some simple data analysis can also be carried out online and the results furnished to the subscriber. In this case the data was downloaded as an Excel-type spreadsheet, and imported into the SPSS software.

In September 2007 I sent a web link for a version of the questionnaire to 15 ministers known personally to me. Most of these kindly completed it, offering comments on the experience of taking the survey that were useful in re-drafting some of the questions. The final draft of the questionnaire was ready in October 2007.

### **The final pilot**

It was agreed with the Ministries Council that the invitation to complete the survey would be sent by them to a sub-group of 50 ministers before rolling it out to the entire group of ministers. The only changes to the survey following that were extremely minor refinement, such as providing a drop-down list of institutions to choose from, when I realised that the great majority of the respondents trained at one of four colleges in Scotland. Therefore I have amalgamated the responses from the two periods, after due checking of the data for duplicates or repeated submissions.

## **Checking for duplicates**

It is theoretically possible, although extremely unlikely that the same person could submit numerous different questionnaire responses, and there was no evidence at all that this was done. Although the submitted questionnaires were anonymous to the researcher, a search for duplicates was made possible by the comparison of the IP addresses for the computer / ISP combination used by the respondents to go online to access the survey website. Cross-referencing respondents' answers sharing the same IP address with answers in the fields of Age, Gender, Training Institution and Preaching Experience revealed four quite clear instances of the same persons submitting twice. In three of these cases, one version of their two replies was largely incomplete. There was one case where the same person appears to have completed the questionnaire shortly after receiving the first email invitation, and then again two weeks later, after receiving the follow – up email. Although age of the respondent was 63, it would perhaps not be appropriate to suggest that a memory lapse may have been responsible for this! The 4 apparent duplicate / incomplete submissions were filtered out of the subsequent data analysis.

## **Sampling and representation, demand characteristics**

It is possible to compare variables from the sample with the statistics for the group of ministers known to the Church of Scotland, and doing so suggests that the sample replying to the email are reasonably representative of the population being surveyed (in this case the 982 Church of Scotland ministers serving at the time of the survey)..

According to the Ministries Council<sup>5</sup> the average age of serving Church of Scotland ministers is 53. The mean (and median) age of my respondents was 50. The gender make-up of serving Church of Scotland ministers is 20% female and 80% male. The sample in the survey was 26% Female and 74% Male.

A number of sociological studies have demonstrated (often in passing) that voluntary participation in a survey and the returning of questionnaires in particular, occurs at a higher rate for females than for males. A variety of reasons for this have been put forward, such as the desire to help, sympathetic imagination, etc., but which need not detain us now. The 6% overbalance of female respondents to my survey would seem to be within the range of this effect.

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<sup>5</sup> In an email from Dorothy M Davidson, Senior Administrator, Ministries Council, dated 15 January 2008.



## Sources of bias and the effect of non-response on the survey

Non-response (or ignored / unreturned questionnaires) is an issue affecting this survey, for the absence in the sample of a significant number of respondents from the pool undermines any claims that the survey is representative of the larger population. Several reasons for non-response may reasonably be put forward.

Non-respondents may not have received or did not read the emails; they may not have access to the internet for the purposes of completing an online survey, because of technological restrictions or personal limitations such as ‘technophobia’ or lack of ability to negotiate online work; they may have preferred not to answer personal questions in a survey, despite the assurances of anonymity; they may not have felt that the survey was sufficiently important or interesting enough; and / or may be unable to justify to themselves the use of time taken to complete it.<sup>6</sup>

Low interest is a problem for many surveys that seek to measure the involvement and enthusiasm of the respondent for the concepts being surveyed. The converse of this is that the survey, explicitly labelled and focussed on preaching, may tend to draw those whose interest is already high. Rosenthal’s work (Rosenthal and Rosnow: 1975) on volunteers in research may be of relevance here. In it he suggests that individuals interested in the subject of the survey could be more drawn to participate in an otherwise voluntary survey than those less interested. This effect may be further magnified by the expectation of such cases that they may be evaluated in favourable ways.

...(in recognition of) validity threats to causal analysis... the demands contained in the research situation ought to be regarded as intentional or unintentional influence attempts transmitted from the investigator to the subject.<sup>7</sup>

I would argue that the on-line survey as used for this field study goes a significant way towards addressing this problem of expected evaluation, in the shielding of the subject from the personal presence of the investigator, in the promise (if taken at face value) of anonymity carried by explicitly and implicitly by the web-site based questionnaire. No identifying personal details were requested, and the subject’s fear of being wrong, or hope of any kind of reward are reduced. The volunteer subject effect is a more likely source of bias. Certainly, as was remarked on in Chapter 6,

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<sup>6</sup> According to the pilot survey for the 23 respondents who completed it in October 2007, the questionnaire took on average 15 minutes to complete.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Rosenthal; Ralph L. Rosnow ‘The Volunteer Subject’ Review author: Thomas V. Bonoma, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Feb., 1977), pp. 126-127.

with 89% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: "Preaching has always formed a significant part of my vocation," we clearly have a sample who should be interested in the topic, and if there are a significant body of ministers who would not recognise preaching, then I have not reached them with this questionnaire. Of course the existence of such a group cannot be ruled out, thus it is an acknowledged restriction in the scope of this research that it is focussing on those who are prepared both to count themselves as preachers and to share their reflections and self-perceptions on what has shaped their learning in that sphere. In defence of my method, I would argue that the attitudes preferences, and similarly phenomenological aspects of learning to preach are only to be found in those inclined to reflect on the process.

### **The feeling of agency**

Further evidence of the commitment and interest of the respondents may be found in the number of voluntary comments that were received with the questionnaires. Several questions in the final survey included a write-in comment box. This option was incorporated in part to improve the experience of taking the survey by increasing the "feeling of agency" for the respondent. The feeling of agency helps to counter any potentially disempowering or discouraging impression that the entire agenda has been set by the researcher. As will be seen, there was a high level of participation in the survey through these questions, and respondents made many pertinent and well-expressed comments. It is important to note that these comments do not have the same statistical validity and status as the numerical data. I have endeavoured to keep apart in this research quantitative and qualitative analysis. In this section of the research, I have only included comments which express fluently a standpoint or attitude that may be demonstrated statistically from the numerical data. That said, the comments were also useful to suggest areas that I had not thought of or that were not suggested through the earlier pilot studies. Not susceptible to quantitative analysis, but nevertheless indicative of the value or importance of preaching is the presence of write-in comments in a number of questions. These include especially comments from 50 respondents on post ordination influences on their preaching, and the comments from 44 respondents on the importance of preaching in their ministry. These are in the main very thoughtful and considered remarks, often in the form of mini-essays of up to 150 words, and represent a remarkable commitment to the ministry of preaching - and to the questionnaire.

## Appendix 3: Field Study 2

### Appendix 3.1: Summary of research participants

#### Writers for *Pulpit Journeys*

Name	Gender	Age at time of writing	Ministry Experience up to time of writing*	Page no.s in book
Richard Bewes	M	60's	Anglican priest	1-14
Mike Breen	M	50's	Anglican priest	15-28
Steve Chalke	M	40's	Baptist minister	29-40
Ian Coffey	M	50's	Baptist minister	41-48
James Dunn	M	60's	Methodist minister, New Testament theologian	49-60
Susan Durber	F	40's	URC <sup>1</sup> minister	61-72
Joel Edwards	M	40's	NTCG <sup>2</sup> minister	73-88
Faith Forster	F	60's	Ichthus Christian Fellowship minister	89-94
Roger Forster	M	60's	Ichthus Christian Fellowship minister	95-110
Rob Frost	M	60's	Methodist minister	111-123
Leslie Griffiths	M	60's	Methodist minister	124-136
Andy Hawthorne	M	40's	Evangelist and Youth work leader	137-148
Anthony Reddie	M	40's	Methodist theologian and educator	149-166
Simon Vibert	M	40's	Anglican priest	167-176
David Wilkinson	M	40's	Methodist minister, theologian	177 -188

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<sup>1</sup> United Reformed Church

<sup>2</sup> New Testament Church of God

## **Appendix 3.2: Invitation letter to writers for *Pulpit Journeys***

Sample Invitation Letter as at 21/04/2004

Dear <Salutation>

I am writing to invite you to contribute to a book I am editing, with the provisional title, *Pulpit Journeys*. It will consist of essays by and interviews with 15 of the most notable Christian preachers working in the UK, on the theme of the formative influences on their development as preachers. It under consideration by Darton Longmann Todd, to be published in 2005, and my editor there is Virginia Hearn.

Would you be prepared to write between 3000-5000 words on this subject? You would have a completely free hand in how to approach this, focussing on any particular aspect as seems inspiring to you. This might be the most influential preacher or teacher you had, how you learned to discern God's word for your sermons, the kind of illustrations you use and how you find new ones, a story of a particular moment of revelation about the preaching task... but you may have other ideas. I hope at any rate that these possible approaches illustrate that the emphasis is on your growth or journey as a preacher, and on what you could share from that experience that would help others coming along.

I can offer a one-off payment of between £75 and £100, depending on length. This money would come out of the publisher's advance on royalties. Any future royalties earned on the book would go to the St John's College Centre for Christian Communication to enable future projects.

The book is being produced as part of the VOX project, a three-year initiative at the Centre for Christian Communication studying the way preaching, apologetics and media skills / literacy are taught to in theological education and ministerial formation in the UK church. Already the VOX Report Summary has been well circulated and the subject of discussions at ministry training colleges and courses. *Pulpit Journeys* will be, I hope, a more personal and story-based way of improving the preaching in this country.

If this proposal were at all interesting to you, I would be really honoured to include your work in the book. I am looking for men and women in this country whose commitment to preaching God's word to God's people is second to none, and whose proven excellence at doing so in itself forms a call that others should learn from them. I am praying that this volume will be a useful contribution to that process.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please don't hesitate to call or write or email if you would like any clarification or to discuss this further, entirely without obligation, of course.

Yours in Christ,     Geoffrey Stevenson

### **Appendix 3.3: Follow-up letter to writers for Pulpit Journeys**

6<sup>th</sup> September, 2004

Dear <author>

#### **Pulpit Journeys**

Thank you so very much for agreeing earlier this year to write for this book. DLT have confirmed that they will publish the book towards the middle of next year, and have offered a contract, so I can now press ahead with proper commissioning of the chapter that we discussed. I would be very pleased to have your contribution, and I suggest a deadline of **30<sup>th</sup> October, 2004**

If you are still able to find time to write - and I understand that diaries are fluid and circumstances change - may I re-state what we are looking for in this book?

In brief it will consist of essays by and interviews with 15 Christian preachers working in the UK, on the subject of what the most important and formative influences on their development as preachers. Autobiographical in nature, the essay should focus, we feel, on **stories, events**, influential **individuals**, and /or moments of revelation about the preaching ministry. Other qualities I am looking for are anecdote and a lightness of touch, rather than it being didactic and, well... preachy. Of course, to some extent *what* you learned at a particular point is not separable from when and how you learned, and I and readers will appreciate the wisdom of your experience. But it needs to be story-based, as far as possible.

One caveat: the commissioning editor feels it is quite important that writers should avoid narrow, confessional statements that might alienate the reader from another wing of the church. I know I hardly need say that to you, but I promised her I would put it in my invitation!

Length should be between 3000-5000 words, and you have a completely free hand in how to approach this, focussing on any particular aspect as seems inspiring to you.

I am still able to offer a one-off payment of between £75 and £100, depending on length. This money would come out of the publisher's advance on royalties. Any future royalties earned on the book will go to the St John's College *Centre for Christian Communication* to enable future projects.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please don't hesitate to write or email (better) if you would like any clarification or to discuss this further.

Yours truly,

Geoffrey Stevenson

### **Appendix 3.4: Letter requesting permission to use material**

(By email, various dates)

Dear <author>

I hope that by now you have not only long since been sent a copy of the book, but received warm congratulations and fawning adulation from friends and admirers. Jest aside, did you have any responses to it? I believe Colin Winter reviewed it for the Church Times with a qualified approval, but then as I often say, such was the breadth of the writers that there is something in the book to annoy everybody..

The real purpose of this letter is to make a formal request. I am currently engaged, as you may know, in PhD research at New College, University of Edinburgh into how preaching is learnt and the learning processes experienced by preachers.

As one part of the empirical research, I am including and analysing the material published in *Pulpit Journeys*. I have been looking for trends in the accounts given that point to best practice where training institutions are involved (admittedly there are not many of those) and more importantly (in my view), the effect and influence of mentors, models, peers and contexts for learning.

I am now seeking your permission to include what you have written in the research. The strong version of this permission is as follows:

- 1) Permission to analyse the material you have written for the purposes of this research, in which your responses as published may be quoted within the research report, and attributed to you.

If you do not wish to be identified in the research, would you give me permission to quote you without specific attribution?

- 2) Permission to analyse the material you have written for the purposes of this research, in which your responses may be quoted within the research report. This limited permission would be on the understanding that the reference will not identify you by name, nor identify 'local' institutions with you have been involved.

If you are prepared to give permission for the first usage, I would be more than willing to accept any qualifications or limitations on the use of your material or any specific parts of it in the thesis and/or any subsequent publication. If, for whatever reason you would be more comfortable granting permission for only the 2<sup>nd</sup> kind of usage, I am completely happy with that, as I will respect your concerns and wishes to the utmost – and no explanations are needed.

If that is OK, then please simply reply to this email either by stating “Yes” inline with one of the following paragraphs, or by copying and pasting the relevant paragraph into the top of your reply.

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\*I do consent and give permission for the use of my contribution to *Pulpit Journeys* for the purposes of research and publication of that research as outlined in 1).

or

\*I do consent and give permission for the use of my contribution to *Pulpit Journeys* for the purposes of research and publication of that research as outlined in 2).

+++++

Finally, please let me know if you would be interested in receiving by email a copy of the chapter of my dissertation in which the Pulpit Journeys material is being treated.

Again, thank you so much for your contribution to the book and to my research.

May God continue to bless your ministry and preserve you in the grace of Christ Jesus.

All the best,

Geoffrey

## **Appendix 4: Field Study 3**

### ***Appendix 4.1: Further description of process***

The third field study involved semi-structured interviews carried out with twelve volunteers previously identified by the former minister at Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church, Liverpool. This appendix contains copies of the relevant material.

The Participant Explanation Form was sent in advance of the interview meeting, and another copy was also offered at the meeting.

The Consent Form was presented at the start of the interview, and the participant was invited and allowed to read it thoroughly before signing it as an agreement of consent to the process.

The Interview Question Schedule was prepared by me, with minor variations, as a guide to the wording and order of questions that could be asked during the interview. Not all questions were asked, but almost always all areas signified by the questions were covered by the interview.

The interviews were recorded using a PC-based recording programme, producing 'mp3' files of the full interview. These were then transcribed and the resultant Word documents were imported, as described in ch. 5 into the NVIVO software programme.



## ***Appendix 4.2: List of research participants***

The following is a summary list of the research participants (with identities hidden) who agreed to be interviewed for the field study.

Code	Gender	Age when at EHD	Methodist ministry experience up to time of interview	Date of interview
01	M	21-27	Ordained minister	17/10/06
02	F	18-22	Ordained minister	17/10/06
03	F	18-21, 23-26	Ordained minister	18/10/06
04	F	18-26	Ordained minister	18/10/06
05	F	18-21	Ordained minister	14/11/06
06	F	51- 60	Ordained minister	14/11/06
07	M	18-21	Minister in training	18/01/07
08	M	31-33	Ordained minister	21/11/06
09	M	16-17	Local Preacher	05/11/06
10	F	18-21	Methodist Local Preacher, now Anglican curate	06/12/06
11	M	18-25, 28-29	Ordained minister	06/12/06
12	F	27-34	Ordained minister	14/02/07

## ***Appendix 4.3: Interview Participant Explanation***

("Subject Information Sheet")

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before we start I would like to give some background and an explanation of procedures.

### **Background**

This doctoral level research into the learning processes experienced by preachers is being carried out by me under the supervision of the University of Edinburgh Schools of Divinity and Education.

### **Your part**

Your participation will consist of a **30 - 40 minute semi-structured interview** on your learning in the area of preaching. I will be trying to find out, for instance, how you have been influenced by teachers, mentors, peers and those who have modelled good (and bad) preaching for you. I will be asking you to reflect on your development as a preacher and whether that development has proceeded imperceptibly or in identifiable stages or a combination. In particular I would like to explore the factors affecting you and your self-understanding as a preacher during the time when you were associated with Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church and/ or the Chaplaincy at Liverpool University.

No preparation is required for the interview. I will not of course be looking for 'correct' answers or any kind of orthodoxy, but hope to have a free and frank conversation with you about your learning experiences within a community of preachers and their congregation(s).

### **Procedure**

Our discussion will be recorded and later transcribed. The interview will be kept strictly confidential. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

The research will be carried out in accordance with guidelines established by the University Ethics Committee.

### **Basis for consent**

Formally speaking, I need to say that your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question. You are free to withdraw at any time. Signing of the consent form will indicate your understanding and acceptance of these conditions.

Geoffrey Stevenson

## Appendix 4.4: Interview Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH PhD RESEARCH

### CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Learning to Preach	
	<i>Please circle your response</i>
I have read the Subject Information Sheet.	YES / NO
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study.	YES / NO
I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions.	YES / NO
I have received enough information about the study.	YES / NO
I understand that data will be stored.	YES / NO
I am prepared for my interview to be recorded and transcribed on the understanding that recordings and transcriptions will not identify me by name.	YES / NO
I am prepared for my responses to be quoted within the research report, again on the understanding that the reference will not identify me by name.	YES / NO
I understand that I may contact the researcher or his supervisors if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator at New College School of Divinity, Edinburgh University.	YES / NO
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study: * at any time * without having to give a reason for withdrawing.	YES / NO
Signed ..... Date .....	
(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....	
Address for those requesting a research report (by post or by email): ..... ..... ..... .....	

## **Appendix 4.5: Researcher's Interview Schedule**

### **Interview Schedule**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Consent: Y / N

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish time: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Variables to record:*

Formal training in 1.Theology 2.Preaching  
(What courses / classes have you taken on preaching?)

Experience: how often / for how many years have you preached?

Active preacher? (3 grades: none, occasional, regular =on a rota or more than once per month on average);

Gender: Brought up in the church? In a manse?

Tell me about your educational background / How many years schooling have you had. \_ What is the highest degree you received? 1.Certificate 2. BA 3. MA 4. Doctorate 5. None

#### *Introduction:*

*Looking for mental models of what the preacher is aiming at:*

How would you describe a good or effective sermon? Or, What do you see as the purpose of your preaching?

#### *The experience at Liverpool*

Thinking of the time at the Chaplaincy, how long were you involved with the activities there?

What stage would you say you were at as a Christian, and as a preacher?

Was there anything special about that time and place that encouraged you to consider preaching?

#### *Understandings of preaching at that time*

Could you describe your view back then of what good sermon should be?

So how has your view changed? Why do you think that has happened?

(Have you developed any new models for preaching since then, how radical have you been, or would you like to be about preaching?)

Thinking of the milestones you passed at that time, but if you like before and after that time, what have been the some of the more significant shifts or major changes to your understanding of preaching over the years. Can you remember when these took place? How did it happen? Who else was involved?

*Looking for mentors, role models*

Have you ever been conscious of patterning your preaching on someone else, or trying to emulate them?

What kind of influence do you think David Wilkinson, or other ordained leaders were having on your call to preach or sense of vocation or self-identity as a preacher?

What about their effect on your preaching at that time?

Are there any others who have influenced / had the greatest effect on how you prepare and deliver a sermon? How have they influenced you? Do you / did you admire them?

*Looking for peer influence*

Considering other preachers learning alongside you, as it were, or who you consider to be at a similar stage – what have you gained from them. How have they encouraged you? Have they discouraged you?

(Can you describe a significant moment on your journey learning to preach- it could be positive or negative.)

*Questions designed to explore learning strategies for their development as preachers:*

"Preaching cannot be taught, only caught? Would you agree or disagree with this?

Have you taken courses in preaching? How formative do you think these have been?

How does feedback following a sermon help you? I'm thinking of different kinds, from other preachers, spouse, congregation, hearing of its effect, etc.

*Trying to isolate the "X factor" – (essential to preaching, and yet possibly preventing the student from engaging reflexively in the learning process).*

Can you comment on the idea of divine involvement in the calling and the making of a preacher?

If you feel I have asked the wrong questions, or missed out something vital in your development as a preacher, please feel free to suggest other areas of exploration.

Interview Log

ENDS